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FANTASTIC

AUGUST, 1969

Vol. 18, No. 6

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Although my name has been on the masthead of this magazine for the past two issues, this is the first opportunity I've had to address myself to you, FANTASTIC's readers. (It should be added that my name was on the first of those two issues by error; the editor of the April issue was Barry N. Malzberg, to whom all credit for it should be directed.)

Two years ago, with half a dozen of novels to my credit, and some five years experience with *The Magazine of FANTASY And SCIENCE FICTION*, I decided the time was ripe for a new and different kind of science fiction magazine. I knew, from conversations with many magazine publishers over the years, that the "wise money" was staying away from science fiction—indeed, away from fiction magazines of all types. A science fiction magazine is considered a marginal-profit item. It must be priced so that sales alone will cover all expenses, because (unlike the major slick magazines) it cannot attract sufficient advertising to defray costs. And sales, in recent years, have actually slipped badly. Indeed, of all the many fiction magazines (most of them pulps) published twenty or thirty years ago, only the present sf magazines and a handful of mystery titles have survived. Where once hundreds of titles flourished, only two dozen or less remain. This is doubly sad for those of us who believe that the fiction magazine remains the fledgling writer's best training ground, for if the fiction magazine passes away entirely, what will be left? Where will the short stories appear?

The low sales enjoyed by the remaining sf magazines have been blamed on many things. Television, it is said, killed the pulp magazine (along with those slicks, like *COLLIERS* and



most recently, *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST*, which published much fiction). Poor distribution is claimed as another cause. Sputnik has also been blamed—people don't need sf anymore, it has been said, when space shots are featured in newspaper headlines, and *LIFE* publishes color photos taken in space.

Well, all those factors may indeed cause the present low sales of sf magazines, but I think another reason must also be considered: Times Are Changing. Everything is changing, and with them those immutables we have long regarded as the bulwarks of our individual lives. When the *POST* finally folded this year, I felt a deep pang. I grew up with the *POST*; as a small boy I waited for each Wednesday's mail delivery so I could scan the *POST*'s cartoons. When I was older, Robert Heinlein's stories were appearing in the *POST*'s pages and I was still a devoted fan. *But that was twenty years ago.* When I reflected upon that pang I'd felt, I realized it was one of nostalgia: I

(Continued on page 109)

WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE

Leith wasn't like most people, but he had his reasons . . .

In the past year Alexei Panshin has proven with the sudden publication of four books—Heinlein in Dimension, Rite of Passage, Star Well and The Thurb Revolution—that he is a major writer in our field. In the following sharp vignette he underlines his growing reputation—

ALEXEI PANSHIN

Wooley's beard and manner were all that you would expect of any psychology instructor, particularly one who enjoys his work. He leaned back in his swivel chair, his feet on his desk, hands folded behind his neck, and looked at the graduate student who had been sharing his partition-board office for the past two weeks.

"I'm curious about you, Holland," he said. "By my conservative estimate, ninety-five per cent of degree candidates in psychology are twitches. What's your problem?"

The room was only about eight feet wide. Holland's desk faced the back of the cubicle, Wooley's faced the door, and there was a narrow aisle between the two. Holland was a teaching assistant and was busy correcting a stack of papers. He looked warily up at Wooley, who had a certain reputation, and then returned his attention to his work.

"No," Wooley said expansively, "on the face of it, I would have said that you had a very low twitch rating."

Wooley's reputation was half for being a thorough-going son of a bitch, half for being fascinating in the class-

room. He had a flamboyant, student-attracting personality that was great fun for those he didn't pick for victims.

Holland finished marking the paper and tossed it on the stack he had completed. Then he said, "What is a twitch rating?"

"Don't you know that neuroses and psychoses are old hat? They need a scientific replacement, and for that purpose I have devised the twitch rating. Radiation is measured in curies, noise is measured in decibels—now psychological problems are measured in twitches. I'd rate you about five. That's very low, particularly for a psych student."

Holland flipped his red pencil to the side and leaned back. "You mean you really think that psych students are more . . . disturbed . . . than . . ."

"They're twitches," Wooley corrected. "That's why they're psychology students. They're not twitchy because they're psych students. What they want is to learn excuses for the way they act. They don't want to change it or even, I think, understand it. They want to excuse it—you know,

'Mama was a boozier, Daddy was a flit, so how can I possibly help myself?' They learn all the reasons that there are for being twitchy and that makes them happy."

Holland cleared his throat and leaned forward to recover his pencil. Holland was a very serious fellow and not completely sure just how serious Wooley was, and that made him ill-at-ease.

"Isn't it possible that you are mistaking an itch for a twitch?" he asked. "Then if somebody scratches, you think he's crazy. But what if their reason isn't an excuse, what if there is a genuine cause and you just can't see it? If you want a crude example, is a concentration-camp inmate a paranoid if he thinks that people are against him?"

"No," Wooley said. "Not unless he's a graduate student in psychology. In that case, I wouldn't make any bets."

"Well, what are you doing here?"

"I'm observing humanity, what else? Look, I'll give you an example of a genuine, make-no-mistake-about-it, 95-rating, excuse-making twitch from right down the hall. Do you know Hector Leith?"

"No. I haven't been here long enough," Holland said. "I don't know everybody's name yet, and I haven't observed anybody twitching in the hall."

Wooley shook his head. "You'd better be careful. You've got the makings of a very sharp tongue there. Come along." He swung his feet to the floor and led the way out into the hall.

Holland hesitated for a moment and then shrugged and followed. The corridor ran between a double row of

brown partition-board cubicles. On the walls of the corridor were photographs, a book display rack, notices, and two plaques celebrating the accomplishments of the department's bowling and softball teams. One of the photographs was of the previous year's crop of graduate students. Wooley pointed at the shortest person in the picture.

"That's Hector Leith," he said.

"I guess I have seen him around."

"How old would you say he is?"

Holland looked at the picture and tried to remember the person he'd seen briefly in the hall. "Not more than eighteen," he said finally.

"He's twenty-seven."

"You're kidding."

"No," Wooley said. "He's twenty-seven, he looks eighteen or less, and he is a genuine twitch."

The person in the photograph was only a few inches more than five feet tall, smooth-cheeked, fresh-faced, elfish-looking. He might possibly have passed for a junior high school student except for his air of tart awareness, and he certainly seemed out of place with the others in the picture. Wooley was there, too, with his beard.

Back in their shared office, Holland returned to his swivel chair while Wooley sat on the edge of his desk.

"Now," Wooley said, "he was drafted by the Army and tossed out after four weeks for emotional instability. I don't hold too much with the Army, but I'd still give him thirty twitch points for that. He started out as a teaching assistant here, but he started twitching in front of the class and now he's a research assistant. You can give him another thirty points for that."

"So what's your diagnosis, Doctor?"

Holland said.

Wooley shrugged. "I don't know. Manic depressive, maybe. One day he'll overflow all over you, try to be friends—try to be buddies and ask you out for a beer. You can't imagine how funny that is between his trying to get into a bar in the first place and the fact that he can't stand beer. He'll tell you all his problems. The next day he won't talk to you at all, hide his little secrets away. And when he's unpleasant, which is more than half the time, he'll leave three-inch scars all over you. Give him fifteen points for that and the last twenty points for his excuses."

"All right. What are they?"

Wooley paused foreffect. "He thinks—he says he's finally figured it out—that he's living at a slower rate than most people, and he really isn't grown up yet. He still has to get his physical and emotional growth. He's where everybody else his age was years ago."

"Why does he think that?"

Wooley smiled. "Well, he thinks he is growing. He thinks he's gaining height."

Holland said seriously, "You know, if it were so, it would really be something, wouldn't it? I can see why it would make somebody twitchy. To be that far out of step, not know why, and be incapable of doing what people expect of you would certainly be a burden. You'd be bound to think it was you and that would only make things worse."

"Perfect excuse, isn't it?" Wooley asked drily. "There's only one problem and that is it's just wishful thinking."

"Well, if he's growing . . ."

"He isn't growing. He just thinks he is. Come on and I'll show you."

He led the way down the hall to another cubicle that was similar to

their own except that there was only one desk. The extra space was taken up by book shelves. Wooley flipped on the light.

"Come on in," he said to Holland and Holland stepped inside.

Wooley pointed to the wall at a point where a wood strip connected pieces of particle board. There were a few faint pencil ticks there, the top and the bottom marks being perhaps an inch and a half apart.

"There," Wooley said. "That's the growing he thinks he's done."

"Only he hasn't?"

"No," Wooley said, chuckling. "I've been moving the marks. I add them on the bottom and erase the top mark. He just keeps putting it back and thinking he's that much taller."

Holland said, "Pardon me. I have work to do." He turned quite deliberately and walked out, his distaste evident.

Wooley said after him, "It's a psychological experiment." But Holland didn't stop.

Wooley shrugged. Then he turned back to the pencil marks and counted them. He then picked a pencil off the desk, erased the topmost mark, and carefully added a mark at the bottom.

Then he tossed the pencil back onto the desk and turned away. Just before he got to the door, Hector Leith came around the corner and into the room. They almost bumped into one another, stopped, and then carefully stepped back.

Leith looked much like his picture: tiny, boyish-looking, incongruous in tie, jacket and black overcoat. The briefcase he carried was the last touch that made him look like a youngster playing Daddy.

He gave Wooley a bitter look and said, "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for a book."

(Continued on page 145)

THE BRIEFING by RANDALL GARRETT

Problem: your race is girding its loins for an impending interstellar war. You need all the help you can get.

Proposed solution: enlist the help of another race—even if this means giving them a boost of their own . . .

Sorry to pull you in on a rush job like this," Marik said, "But something unexpected came up."

"Yeah." I took a healthy slug of the drink in my hand and then looked back at him. "It always does. An operation that goes clean all the way through is an operation where the goof-ups happened to cancel out."

Behind and beyond Marik, through the big slab of transite armor set in the wall of the Station, I could see the bright, hard stars in their unfamiliar constellations. Marik frowned a little, then said: "You know the ggQ machines can only predict general trends—not individual movements."

"I know. Go ahead." I hadn't come across nearly three thousand light-years of space to listen to an elementary lecture on ggQ predictors, but the Development Officer of a Planetary Expansion Team sometimes has a tendency to get a little nervy because of the weight on his shoulders, so I decided to let him do the talking without too much interruption. I could ask questions later.

He took a deep breath. "Very well. Here's the setup." He touched a control. A section of the wall vanished and a globe coalesced into being. "Standard planet, standard sun—pretty average, all around. Four major land masses, a fifth smaller one, and plenty of islands and archipelagoes. Dominant race human, spread all over the globe. Level Five society is dominant, but not world-wide, of course. Present civilized power concentrations are here and here." He touched two of the major continents. "They've got the usual technology for Level Five—nothing that can spot us out here in space." He snapped a control, and the globe vanished, the wall became solid. He waved a hand, as if to say, "So much for that."

He was perfectly right; I'd get all the details, if I needed them, from the high-speed hypnotapes. Right now, all I needed was the broad general picture, so that the data fed to me under hypnosis would have a framework to fit itself into.

"It's almost a straight impersonation job," Marik said, "with a kicker I'll

tell you about in a minute. Here's your subject."

He handed me a good set of portrait shots. Not a bad looking face, what you could see of it. Dark skin, big beak of a nose, and dark, intelligent eyes.

"What's with the beard?" I asked.

"The-er-somewhat peculiar subculture to which he belongs use long hair and beards as identifying marks. The ruling class are usually smooth shaven and wear the hair cropped closely to the head."

I nodded. "Right. Well, biosculp can fix me up with the face all right. No trouble there." I dropped the pics on his desk. "Tell me more about the problem."

Marik leaned back and looked at the ceiling overhead. "The ggQ machines indicate quite clearly that the society of this planet is rapidly approaching a two-valued variable nexus. The breakdown of the entire society is inevitable—that's natural with Level Five, of course. The 'empires' they build are inherently unstable. Result: chaos. Breakdown of communication, loss of knowledge, collapse of the educational processes, political anarchy—the usual sort of thing."

He looked back down at me and held up a pair of fingers. "But this particular chaos can go only one of two ways. And one will last nearly twenty times as long as the other. And that will be too late."

I knew what he meant. We have a deadline. The Invaders were still a vast distance from us in time and space, but we knew when they were due to

arrival. And at that time, every human-occupied planet in the Galaxy must be ready for maximum effort.

"All right," I said, "now tie in our hairy-faced friend, here."

"He's a young man who has built up the nucleus of an organization which, if allowed to develop, will decrease the time required to return to Level Five by a factor of twenty. According to the ggQ predictions, the organization will fall to Level Four along with the rest of the society—and you know what kind of bloody tyranny that can mean. But it's time we need, not goodness."

"Right. Now, what's the kicker?"

Marik looked grim. "The reactionaries in the governmental power structure have the subconscious knowledge that the structure is headed for collapse, so they've been looking for 'subversives.' "

"As usual," I said with a sigh. "And they found him?"

He nodded. "Right. Minor harassment at first. We thought we could protect him, but the government agents acted too fast for us. He's dead."

"So I go in and impersonate him. We pretend that the death was a hoax."

"Not exactly. Psychology Department has another gimmick rigged up, and you'll have to take a full hypnoimpression of his personality so you can bring the thing off successfully. But the first thing to do is use the high-speed hypnotapes to teach you Aramaic."

"Aramaic?"

"Yes. That's the language they use in Judea."

THE END

The conclusion of Jack Vance's major new novel—

Ghyl Tarvoke's whole life seemed to prepare him for the re-enactment of the legend of Emphyrio—but how did that legend end?

EMPHYRIO

JACK VANCE

Second of Two Parts

Illustrated by BRUCE JONES

SYNOPSIS

In the chamber at the top of the tower were six individuals, three men who were known as 'Lords', the man who was their prisoner, and two Garrion. The Garrion, bodyguards to the Lords, were not men.

The prisoner was clamped, unconscious, into an intricately articulated frame. The top of his skull had been removed, and directly on the naked brain rested a striated yellow gel. Above hung an ugly black capsule of glass and metal, its surface marked by a dozen wart-like protuberances. From each a quivering thread of radiation projected into the gel below.

Of the Lords, two were tall and thin, dead white of skin, black hair varnished closely to their heads: they were Lord Fray and Lord Fanton. Grand Lord Dugald the Boimarc was older, heavier, features vulpine, skin darkly florid.

Fray operated the mechanism to which the prisoner was joined. "The brain is now organized into seven realms," he explained. "We bring him to a desired condition by relaxing control of specific realms, and, if necessary, damping or squelching others. Since Lord Dugald does not intend rehabilitation, we will relax the stages one at a time until he is able to provide the accurate statement Lord Dugald requires."

First the prisoner's genetic responses were restored. Second, he was made aware: able to recognize but not to relate, unable to distinguish between himself and his surroundings. Third, he was made able to compare his perceptions to his memory and to make qualitative identifications. But he was not yet conscious.

Fray spoke to the prisoner in a cold clear voice: "Who are you?"

The young man frowned; he mois-

tened his lips. When he spoke the sound seemed distant: "Emphyrio."

It was not the name they had expected. Fray asked again, "What, then, is your birth-name?"

"Ghyl Tarvoke."

Fray turned the fourth key. Ghyl Tarvoke winced and strained. "He is now capable of perceiving relationships, making comparisons. He is, in a sense, lucid."

Frey continued to restore to the prisoner the captive areas of his brain. Phase five: Tarvoke's time-scale was restored, and with it his memory. Phase six: Tarvoke made savage animal sounds, gnashed his teeth, strained at his bonds. Fray hurriedly made adjustments. Tarvoke was restored to consciousness.

"He is not yet a total person," Fray said. "He lacks the use of his free connections; he is incapable of spontaneity. He cannot dissemble, because he cannot create. He cannot hope, he cannot plan, and therefore he has no will. We will hear the truth."

Dugald came forward, planted himself flat-footed in front of the prisoner: "Ghyl Tarvoke: we wish to learn the background to your crimes."

"I don't know what you want to hear."

"The circumstances contributing to your abominable crimes!"

"I remember a lifetime of events. I will tell you everything."

GHYL TARVOKE was born into the poverty-stricken welfare-state of Ambroy, in Fortinone, on Halma. An ancient and half-ruined city, Ambroy is ruled by the Lords, who hold fiefdom over the utilities they restored to the city after the last great war, some two thousand years earlier. These utili-



ties are, in the language of the time, *Spay, Chaluz, Flowan, Overtrend, Underline and Boimarc: communications, energy, water, transit, sewerage, and trade.*

No citizen of Ambroy knows want, for all are on the Welfare roles, and administered to by the Welfare Agent of their neighborhood. Conversely, no citizen of Ambroy knows wealth, since all forms of mechanized industry are outlawed, all manufacturing is done by hand by artisans, and their crafts are sold (for fabulous sums) by their Lords (with whom the profits appear to remain). "Duping" or mechanical duplication, is considered a terrible crime; this regulation seems to spring from the laws of the guilds, but actually serves the Lords in their continued enslavement of the population.

It was at a puppet-show, on his seventh birthday, that GHYL first encountered the legend of EMPHYRIO. Later his father, the master wood-carver AMIANTE, showed him a scrap of ancient printing which related a fragment of the legend. EMPHYRIO, it seems, freed his people of enslavement by monsters by speaking a terrible truth to them.

AMIANTE is a curious father, for he does not encourage GHYL to visit the temple for instruction in leaping, nor does he insist upon the early necessity for GHYL to learn a trade. But inevitably he gives way to the pressure of the Welfare Agents, enrolls GHYL in the temple, and apprentices him to be a wood-carver. But AMIANTE does more: he teaches his son the Formal Archaic printing, showing him the precious documents of other ages of which he alone has kept copies.

One of these documents is the Great Charter of Ambroy, the basic law of

Ambroy to which the Welfare Code and Guild Regulations both must (theoretically) yield.

As a young man, at the urging of NION BOHART (a rather dangerous trouble-maker), GHYL files for election for Mayor of Ambroy, under the cognomen of 'EMPHYRIO'. It was at first a drunken jest, a desire to shake up the Welfare Agents, but it grew out on hand too quickly. For AMIANTE illegally duped posters urging 'EMPHYRIO's election, posted them all over the city, and then claimed it as his right under the Great Charter: "Any citizen of virtuous quality and good reputation may aspire to public office; furthermore he and his sponsors may present to public attention notice of such candidacy, by means of advertisement, public posting of printed bulletins or placards . . . etc."

The Welfare Agents were not impressed, particularly as they could not read the Formal Archaic of the Charter, and were concerned only with the violation of their own Codes and the Guild Laws. AMIANTE was 'rehabilitated' by use of the machine described earlier: he was brainwashed, and made docile.

Now the election draws close, and GHYL is informed by Welfare Agent SCHUTE COBOL that "Expert opinion has defined your conduct as verging upon felonious."

"Indeed?" asked Ghyl, a harsh, acid flavor rising in his throat. "Why is this?"

"First: your candidacy is clearly a malicious prank, an attempt to demean the city. Such an attitude is irreverent and intolerable.

"Secondly, you are attempting obfuscation of the Welfare Rolls by naming yourself with the name of a

legendary and non-existent man.

"Thirdly, by associating yourself with this legend of rebellion against established order, you implicitly advocate chaoticism.

"Fourthly, you have consorted with noncuperatives. Noncuperatives are beyond Welfare Regulations, hence ir-regulationary, though not actively proscribed. The candidacy of 'Emphyrio' is undoubtedly a noncuperative conception.

"Fifthly, you are the son and associate of a man admonished for duplicating. We cannot prove collusion, but surely you were aware of what was transpiring. You made no report of the crime. Purposeful failure to report a crime is a felony.

"In none of these five instances is your delinquency definite enough to be brought home to you; in this regard you are a subtle young man. Still, be assured that you deceive no one, that you will be subjected to careful observation. This gentleman—" he indicated a man in black "—is Chief Executive Investigator of Brueben Precinct, a very important person. His interest has been attracted, and from your point of view this is not a propitious circumstance."

The Welfare Agents departed, and Nion Bohart looked at Ghyl. "Phew! What a hornet's nest!"

Ghyl went to sit down at his work-bench. "Have I done something terribly wrong? I can't decide . . ."

Nion, finding nothing more to interest him, went to the door. "Election tomorrow," he called over his shoulder. "Don't forget to vote!"

Chapter 10

There were five candidates for the office of mayor. The incumbent

received a plurality of the votes and was returned to his sinecure. 'Emphyrio' was a surprisingly strong third with approximately ten percent of all votes cast—enough to disturb the Welfare Agency anew.

Schute Cobol came to the shop and demanded all of Amiante's private papers. Amiante, sitting at his work-bench, working listlessly at his screen, looked up with a peculiar light in his eyes. Schute Cobol came a stride closer; Amiante, to Ghyl's astonishment, sprang erect and struck Schute Cobol with a mallet. Schute Cobol fell to the ground; Amiante would have struck again, had not Ghyl taken away the mallet. Schute Cobol, moaning and holding his head, tottered from the shop and out into the golden afternoon light.

Amiante said to Ghyl in a voice Ghyl would never have recognized, "Take the papers. They are yours. Keep them safe." He went out into the square and sat upon a bench.

Ghyl hid the portfolio under the roof-tiles. An hour later Welfare Agents came to take Amiante away.

When he returned after four days, he was bland, easy, indifferent. A month later he fell into a dull mood and slumped into a chair. Ghyl watched him anxiously.

Amiante dozed. When Ghyl brought him a bowl of gruel for his lunch, Amiante was dead.

Ghyl was alone in the old shop. It was full of Amiante's presence: his tools, his patterns, his mild voice. Ghyl could hardly see for eyes full of grief. What now? Should he continue to work as a wood-carver? Go noncup and live the life of a vagabond? Perhaps he should emigrate to Luschein or Salula? He brought Amiante's portfolio

down from the roof, went through the papers which Amiante had handled so lovingly. He puzzled through the ancient charter, shook his head sadly at the idealistic vision of the city's founders. He re-read the Empyrio fragment, from which he drew courage. "Empyrio strove and suffered for truth. I shall do likewise! If only I can find the strength within myself! This is what Amiante would want!"

He removed the fragment and the charter from the portfolio and hid them separately; the portfolio he put in the accustomed place.

He went back to stand in the workshop. The building was quiet, except for strange little noises he had never before noticed: creaks of the ancient timbers, a flutter of wind in the tiles. Afternoon came; a flood of mellow light poured in through the amber windows. How often had Ghyl sat in this light, with his father at his own bench across the room!

Ghyl fought the tears back from his eyes. He must use his strength, he must develop, gain knowledge. There was no single focus for the great dissatisfaction he felt. The Welfare Agency worked, by and large, for the benefit of the recipients. The Guilds enforced the standards of excellence by which Ambroy survived in relative ease and security. The lords extracted their 1.18% from the economy, but the amount hardly seemed excessive.

What then was wrong? Where was truth? What course would Empyrio have taken? In desperation, to ease his need for activity, Ghyl seized up chisels, and going to Amiante's bench worked on his great *perdura* panel: the Winged Being plucking fruit from the Tree of Life. He worked with feverish energy; chips and scrapings covered

the floor. Schute Cobol passed outside the shop, rapped, opened the door, peered within. He said nothing. Ghyl said nothing. The two looked into each other's eyes. Schute Cobol nodded slowly, departed.

Time passed: a year, two years. Ghyl saw none of his old friends. For recreation he took long hikes in the country, often sleeping the night under a hedge. Living by himself he became a different person: a young man of average height, with hard shoulders, taut muscles. His features were blunt but hard and compressed; there were ridges of muscle around his mouth. He wore his hair cropped short, his garments were plain and devoid of ornamentation.

One day in early summer he finished a screen and by way of relaxation walked south through Brueben and Hoge, into Cato, and by chance passed Keecher's Inn. Obeying a random impulse, he went in, ordered a mug of ale, a plate of steamed whelks. All was precisely as he remembered, though the scale seemed smaller and the decorations not quite so splendid. Girls from the bench looked him over, approached; Ghyl sent them away, and sat watching the folk come and go . . . A face he knew: Floriel! Ghyl called out; Floriel turned and, seeing Ghyl, evinced astonishment. "What in the world do you do here?"

"Nothing unusual." Ghyl indicated his ale, his plate. "I eat, I drink."

Floriel cautiously pulled up a chair. "I must say I'm surprised . . . I heard that after your father's death you had—well, become quiet, distant. Even a recluse. A real voucher-grabber for work."

Ghyl laughed—the first time in how long! Years, it seemed. It was good

to laugh again. Perhaps the ale was responsible. Perhaps a sudden yearning for companionship. "I've been pretty much alone. What of you? You've changed since I saw you last." And indeed Floriel had become, not a new person, but an augmented version of his previous self. He was as handsome as ever, as debonair, with added control, craft, alertness. He said, with a trace of complacence, "I've changed a bit, I suppose. At heart the same Floriel, of course."

"You're still in Metal-benders?"

Floriel gave Ghyl a glance of injured surprise. "Of course not. Haven't you heard? I've gone noncup. You're sitting with a man outside organized society. Aren't you ashamed?"

"No, I hadn't heard." Ghyl looked Floriel up and down, noting the signs of prosperity. "How do you live? You don't seem to be deprived. Where do you get your vouchers?"

"Oh, I manage, one way or another. I fell into a little cottage up the river, a lovely place. I rent this out over the weekends, and do a fair business. And, to be candid, sometimes I bring up girls for men on a bit of a tear. Nothing absolutely criminal, you understand. One way or another I make out. And you?"

"Still carving screens."

"Ah then, you'll continue in the trade?"

"I don't know . . . Remember how we used to talk of travel?"

"Yes, of course. I've never forgotten."

"Nor I." Ghyl leaned forward, gazing down into his ale. "Life here is futility. We'll live and die, and realize no glimmer of truth. There's something terribly wrong here in Ambroy. Do you realize this?"

Floriel looked at him askance. "Still the same old Ghyl! You haven't changed a bit!"

"How do you mean?"

"You always were idealistic. Do you think I care a whit for truth or knowledge? No. But I'll travel and in style too. In fact—" Floriel looked right and left "—you remember Nion Bohart, of course."

"Certainly."

"I see him often. He and I have some grand ideas. The only way to get is to take—from those who have: the lords."

"You mean: kidnapping?"

"Why not? I don't consider it wrong. They take from us; we must redress the balance and take from them."

"One difficulty: if you are caught, you'll be expelled into Bauredel. What good is wealth to a man an inch thick?"

"Ha ha! We won't be caught!"

Ghyl shrugged. "Go ahead, with my blessings. I don't mind. The lords can stand to lose a few vouchers. They extract enough from us."

"That's the way to talk!"

"Has Nion gone noncup?"

"Certainly. He's been quietly noncup for years."

"I always suspected as much."

Floriel ordered more ale. "To Empyphrio! What a marvelous put-on, that election! So many folk in a dither. Welfare Agents out looking here and there, simply wonderful!"

Ghyl put down his mug with a grimace. Floriel rattled on, unheeding. "I've had good times as a noncup, I tell you! I recommend it! You live by your wits, true, but there's no bowing and scraping to Welfare Agent and Guild Delegate."

"So long as you don't get caught."

Floriel nodded owlishly. "One must

be discreet, of course. But it's not too hard. You'd be astounded by the opportunities! Cut the twig! Go noncup!"

Ghyl smiled. "I've thought of it, many times. But—I don't know how I'd make a living."

"There are hundreds of chances for clever men. Nion chartered a river barge, let it be known that indiscreet behavior was quite all right, and earned three thousand vouchers over one weekend! There's the way to operate!"

"I suppose so. I don't have the golden touch."

"I'll be glad to show you the ropes. Why don't you come up to my cottage for a few days? It's right on the river, not far from County Pavilion. We'll do nothing—just lounge about, eat, drink, talk. Do you have a girl friend?"

"No."

"Well, I might be able to fix you up. I'm living with a girl myself; in fact, I think you know her: Sonjaly Rathe."

Ghyl nodded with a grim smile. "I remember her."

"Well, then what do you say?"

"It sounds pleasant. I'd like to visit your cottage."

"Good! Let's say—next weekend. An opportune time, just right for the County Ball!"

"Very well. Do I need new clothes?"

"Of course not! We're very casual. The County Ball is costume, of course, so buy some sort of whack-up and a domino. Otherwise—just a swim-suit."

"How do I find the place?"

"Ride Overtrend to Grigglesby Corners. Walk back two hundred steps, go out a plank bridge to the blue cottage with the yellow sun-strike."

"I'll be there."

"Er—should I ask along an extra girl?"

Ghyl considered a moment. "No," he said at last. "I think not."

"Oh come," teased Floriel. "Surely you're not puritanical!"

"No. But I don't want to become involved in anything. I know myself. I can't stop halfway."

"Don't stop halfway! Why be a coward?"

"Oh, very well. Do as you like."

Chapter 11

The ride along the Insse was pleasant. The Overtrend cars slid on magnetic cushions without jar or sound; through the windows the Insse reflected back the sunlight. From time to time thickets of willow or horsewhistle intervened, or banks of sponge-tree or black-web. To the other side were pastures where biloa birds grazed.

Ghyl sat back, lost in reverie. It was time, he thought, to broaden his life, to take in more territory. Perhaps here was the reason he had so readily accepted Floriel's invitation. Schute Cobol would certainly disapprove. A fig for Schute Cobol. If only it were easier to travel, to achieve some measure of financial independence . . .

The car halted at Grigglesby Corner; Ghyl alighted, received his bag from the ejector. *What a pleasant spot!* he thought. Enormous sad-apple trees towered above the brown buildings of the little depot and store, the yellow-green foliage streaming in the smoky sunlight, filling the air with a pleasant acrid scent.

Ghyl walked back along the riverbank on a cushion of old leaves. Along the other shore a dark-haired girl in a white frock lazily paddled a skiff; she saw him watching; she smiled and waved her hand; then the current eased her around a bend and into a dark little inlet, away from sight. It was as if never, never, had a girl in a white dress floated along the sunlit river . . . Ghyl shook his head, grinned at his

own vagaries.

He continued along the bank, and presently came to a trestle leading through the reeds to a pale blue cottage under a water-cherry tree.

Ghyl walked out along the precarious planks, to a porch overlooking the river. Here sat Floriel in white shorts and a cool pretty blonde girl whom Ghyl saw to be Sonjaly Rathe. She nodded, smiled with simulated enthusiasm; Floriel jumped to his feet. "So you've arrived! Good to see you. Bring your bag on in; I'll show you where to chuck your gear."

Ghyl was assigned a small chamber overlooking the river with yellow-brown ripples of light coursing across the ceiling. He changed to loose light clothes and went out to the porch. Floriel thrust a goblet of punch into his hand, indicated a sling chair. "Now, simply relax! Laze! Something you recipients never know how to do. Always striving, cringing when the delegate points his dirty fingernail at a flaw! Not for me!"

"Not for me either," sighed Sonjaly, snuggling against Floriel, with an enigmatic glance toward Ghyl.

"Not for me either," confessed Ghyl, "if I knew how to live otherwise."

"Go noncun!"

"What if I did? All I know is carving screens. Where would I sell? Certainly not to the Guild. It looks after its own."

"There are ways, there are ways!"

"No doubt. I don't care to steal."

"It all depends," stated Sonjaly, with the air of one reciting a liturgy, "from whom one steals."

"I regard the lords as fair game," said Floriel. "And perhaps a few other portly institutions as well."

"The lords, yes," said Ghyl, "or almost yes, at any rate. I'd have to

consider each case on its merits."

Floriel laughed, waved his goblet. "Ghyl, you are far too serious, far too earnest! Always you want to delve to some impossible fundamental, like an impet diving for a mud-eel."

Ghyl laughed also. "If I'm too serious, you're too irresponsible."

"Bah," retorted Floriel. "Is the world responsible? Of course not! The world is random, vagrant, heedless. To be responsible is to be out of phase, to be insane!"

Ghyl pondered a moment. "This is perhaps the case, in a world left to itself. But society imposes order. Living in a society, it is not insane to be responsible."

"Total bosh!" And Floriel went on to detail the irrationality of certain Guild practices, of Temple ritual, of Agency regulation: none of which Ghyl could refute.

"I agree, much of our society is absurd. But should we throw out the baby with the bath? The guilds, the Agency, no matter how insane at times, are necessary instruments. Even the lords serve a purpose."

"We need a change!" declared Floriel. "The lords originally provided valuable capital and expertise. Undeniable. But they have earned back their capital many times over. Do you realize how much 1.18 percent of our gross product is? Have you ever calculated the sum? No? Well, it is enormous. Over the course of years, it becomes stupendous. In fact, it is incredible how so few lords are able to spend so much money. Not even space-yachts cost so much. And I've heard it said that the eyries are by no means paved with gold. Nion Bohart knows a plumber who services eyrie drains, and, according to this plumber, some of the eyries are almost austere."

Ghyl shrugged. "I don't care where or how they spend their money—though I'd prefer they bought my screens rather than, say, Lu-Hang stain-silk. But I don't think I'd care to abolish the lords. They provide us with a spectacle, with drama, with vicarious elegance."

"My dearest goal is to live like a lord," declared Floriel. "Abolish them? Never! Parasites though they may be."

Sonjaly rose to her feet. She wore only a brief skirt and a bit of a loose blouse. Walking past Ghyl she swung her slender body provocatively. Floriel winked at Ghyl. "Pour us all more punch and less strutting back and forth. We know you're beautiful!"

Sonjaly languidly poured punch. "Beautiful, yes. What good does it do me? I want to travel. Floriel won't take me even so far as the Meagher Mountains." And playfully she put her hand under Ghyl's chin. "Would you?"

"I'm as poor as Floriel," said Ghyl, "and not even a thief. My traveling must be by shank's mare, which you're very welcome to share."

Sonjaly made a wry face and went off into the house. Floriel leaned toward Ghyl and muttered hurriedly, "About that girl I wanted to invite: the one I had in mind was busy elsewhere. Sonjaly tried Gedee—"

"What?" cried Ghyl in consternation.

"—but she is studying to pass a fish-packing examination."

"Fish-packing?"

"You know—packing preserved fish in cans and cartons. There is an art to the process—so Gedee tells me. You curl the dear little toe fins and place the specimen just so, and with a sweeping motion pull the feelers down into the oral cavity."

"Spare me the details," said Ghyl. "Spare me, likewise, Gedee."

"It's all for the best," Floriel assured him. "You can go to the ball unencumbered, and your eye can rove as far as it likes. There's bound to be lords and ladies present."

"Really now! How do you know?"

Floriel pointed. "Look yonder, around the bend. See that bit of white? That's the County Pavilion. Off beyond is a vast park, the estate of Lord Aldo the Underline. During the summer many lords and ladies—especially the young ones—come down from the eyries, and they all dote on the County Ball! I wager there'll be fifty on hand."

"With a hundred Garrion," said Ghyl. "Will the Garrion be in costume, with dominoes and all?"

Floriel laughed. "What a sight! We shall see. Naturally you brought a costume?"

"Yes. Nothing very much. I'll be a Zambolian warrior."

"Good enough. I'm a pierrot. Nion is coming as a Jeng serpent-man."

"Oh? Nion will be here also?"

"Of course. Nion and I are associates, so to speak. We do quite well, as you may imagine."

Ghyl sipped his punch with a faint frown. Floriel was easy and amiable; Ghyl could relax and enjoy Floriel's nonsense. Nion, on the other hand, always aroused in Ghyl a vague and formless challenge. Ghyl drained his goblet. He would ignore Nion completely; he would remain calm in the face of all provocation.

Floriel took the pitcher, went to pour punch, but the pitcher was empty. "Inside there!" he called to Sonjaly. "Mix us punch, there's a good girl."

"Mix it yourself," came a petulant voice. "I'm lying down."

Floriel went inside with the pitcher.

There were a few muffled words of altercation, then Floriel came forth with a brimming pitcher. "Now tell me about yourself. How are you making it without your father? Isn't that great old house lonesome?"

Ghyl responded that he lived modestly but adequately; that indeed the shop was sometimes lonely.

The hours passed. They ate cheese and pickles for lunch and later all plunged into the river for a swim. Nion Bohart arrived just as they were emerging from the water. "Halloo, halloo! All you wet creatures! Ghyl, too, I see! It's been a long time! And Sonjaly! Adorable creature—especially in that wet clinging trifle. Floriel, you really don't deserve her."

Sonjaly turned Floriel a rather spiteful glance. "I keep telling him the same thing. But he doesn't believe me."

"We'll have to do something about that . . . Well then, Floriel, where shall I stow my bags? The usual little den? Anything's good enough for old Nion, eh? Well, all right, I don't mind."

"Come now," said Floriel. "You always demand and receive the best bed in the house."

"In that case—better beds!"

"Yes, yes, of course . . . You've brought your costume?"

"Naturally. This shall be the most exalted County Ball of all time. We'll make it that way . . . What is that you're drinking?"

"Montarada punch."

"I'll have some, if I may."

"Allow me," said Sonjaly. And bowing sinuously she handed Nion a goblet. Floriel turned away in disgust, obviously not amused.

Floriel's disapproval failed to influence either Sonjaly or Nion, and during the remainder of the afternoon they flirted with ever greater daring, exchanging glances, casual touches which

were barely disguised caresses. Floriel became increasingly disturbed. At last he made a sarcastic comment, to which Sonjaly gave a flippant rejoinder. Floriel lost his temper. "Do what you like!" he sneered. "I can't control you; I wouldn't if I could; I've seen too much control!"

Nion laughed in great good humor. "Floriel, you're an idealist, no less than Ghyl. Control is necessary and even good—so long as I do the controlling."

"How strange," muttered Floriel. "Ghyl tells me the same thing."

"What?" asked Ghyl in surprise. "I said no such thing. My point was that organization is necessary to social living!"

"True!" stated Nion. "Even the Chaoticists agree to that: paradoxical as it may seem. And you, Ghyl, you're still a staunch recipient?"

"Not really . . . I don't know what I am. I feel I must learn."

"A waste of time. There's your idealism again. Life is too short for pondering! No indecision! If you wish the sweets of life, you must reach forth to take them!"

"And also be prepared to run when the owner comes to punish you."

"That too. I have no false pride; I'll run very fast. I have no desire to set anyone a good example."

Ghyl laughed. "At least you are honest."

"I suppose so. The Welfare Agency suspects me of rascality. However they can't prove it."

Ghyl looked out across the brimming river. This sort of life, in spite of Sonjaly's waywardness and Floriel's bickering, seemed much more gay and normal than his usual routine: carving, polishing, a walk to the shop for food, eating, sleeping, more of the same. All for the sake of a monthly stipend! If

Floriel could earn enough to live in ease and leisure, in a cottage on the river, why could he not do the same?

Ghyl Tarvoke, a noncup? Why not? He need not steal nor blackmail nor procure. Undoubtedly there were vouchers to be earned legitimately—or almost legitimately. Ghyl turned to Nion: "When a person goes noncup, how in the world does he stay alive?"

Nion looked at him quizzically, obviously well aware of what was going on in Ghyl's mind. "No trouble whatever. There are dozens of ways to stay afloat. If ever you make the decision, come to me. You'd very likely do well, with your air of respectability. No one would suspect you of sharp practice."

"I'll keep you in mind."

The sun declined; the sky burnt with such a sunset as Ghyl had not seen since his childhood, when he had often watched the sun sink into the ocean from Dunkum's Heights. "Time we were dressing for the ball," said Floriel. "The music starts in half an hour, and we want to be on hand for everything. First, I'll bring up the skiff, to ferry us across the river."

He walked ashore by the trestle. Ghyl went to his room, then came out to surprise Nion and Sonjaly locked in an unmistakably ardent embrace. "Excuse me," said Ghyl.

Neither heeded him and he returned to his room.

Chapter 12

Floriel Huszuis, Sonjaly Rathe, Nion Bohart, Ghyl Tarvoke: wearing fantastic costumes, normal personalities suppressed by their dominoes, the four stepped into the skiff.

Floriel sculled across the river to the pavilion already aglow from flares of chalk-green, pink and yellow, and thousands of tiny sparkling white coruscations.

Floriel held the skiff while his passengers alighted, then tied the painter to a ring and clambered up to the dock. The pavilion lay before them: an expanse of polished wood, with private boxes and observation areas to either side. At the floor-level a double row of exquisitely decorated booths provided wine and other refreshment for the celebrants.

An officer accosted the four, collected admission fees. They wandered out upon the floor in company with perhaps a hundred others. Lords? Ladies? Recipients from the surrounding countryside? From the city? Noncups like Floriel, Sonjaly, Nion? Ghyl could not identify one from the other and he wondered if Nion, usually so knowledgeable, would be able to do so.

At a booth all provided themselves with green crackle-glass flasks of edel-wine and stood watching the spectacle. Now musicians mounted to a dias, all wearing buffoon's garments of checkered black and white. They tuned instruments: a sound thrilling and premonitory of gayety, as sweet as music itself. Then they scraped their fiddles, droned on their concertinas and struck up a gay tune.

The dances of the time were extremely sedate, a far cry from the caracoles of the Last Empire or the orgiastic whirling and twitching to be seen at the seaports of the South Continent. There were several types of pavannes, as many promenades, and for the young, a kind of a swinging hand-in-hand skipping dance, of considerable vivacity. In all cases the couples stood side by side, holding hands or locking elbows.

This first tune was an adagio, the corresponding dance consisting of a slow step, a shuffle, a bow forward, another far back, the knee raised as

high as possible, and held stationary, while the music played a fluttering little figure, whereupon the whole series was repeated.

Ghyl, with neither skill nor inclination, watched as Nion moved purposefully toward Sonjaly, only to have Floriel step quickly in front of him and take the half-amused, half-petulant Sonjaly out upon the floor.

Nion went back to stand by Ghyl, his grin benign and indulgent. "Poor Floriel, when will he learn?"

Back and forth along the floor stepped the dancers, graceful-grotesque, grotesque-graceful. There were simulations of a hundred sorts: clowns, demons, heroes; folk from far stars and ancient times; creatures of fantasy, nightmare, faery. The pavilion was rich. There was glitter of metal, the soft sheen of silk; gauze in every color; black leather, black wood, black velvet. Nion touched Bhyl's arm: "There gather the lords and their ladies, by the archway. Look at them peering this way and that; a shame they must be so cautious. Why cannot they mingle more freely with ordinary folk?"

Ghyl refrained from pointing out that fear, as well as pride and haughtiness, was at work. He asked curiously, "How do you know them for lords?"

"Mannerisms. They are distinct in many ways. Look how they stand by the walls. Some say they have learned a fear of space from living so long in the upper air. Their equilibrium is also affected; should you dance with a lady, you'd know at once; she'd be supple but erratic, without feeling for the music."

"Oh? Have you danced with ladies?"

"Danced, and more, if you'll believe me . . . Look, watch them now: preening, twittering, debating advisabilities—oh, they're a sage fastidious people!"

The lords and ladies had come in several groups, which now fragmented. One by one, they slipped out upon the pavilion, like magical creatures daring a voyage on a perilous sea.

Ghyl scanned the upper tiers. "Where are the Garrion? Do they stand in the dark booths above?"

"Perhaps." Nion shrugged ignorance. "Look at them, those lords! Watch how they stare at the girls! Randy as buck wisnets! Give them ten minutes, they'd impregnate every female in the pavilion!"

Ghyl followed his gesture, but now all looked alike; lords and ladies were lost in the crowd.

The music stopped; Sonjaly brought Floriel across the floor.

"The lords are here," Nion told them. "One contingent at any rate, and there may be more."

Sonjaly wanted the lords pointed out, but now even Nion was hard put to differentiate lord from recipient.

The music started again: a slow pavanne. Floriel instantly took possession of Sonjaly but she gave her head a shake. "Thank you, no; I'd like to rest."

Ghyl, watching the dancers, decided that the step was within his capabilities. Determined to prove himself as rakehell and gallant as the others, Ghyl presented himself to a shapely girl in a costume of green scales with a green domino, and led her out upon the floor.

He acquitted himself well enough, or so he congratulated himself. The girl had little to say; she lived in the outlying suburb of Godlep, where her father was a public weighmaster.

"Weighmaster?" pondered Ghyl. "Does that go to Scrivners' Guild or Instrument-tenders', Or Functionaries?"

"Functionaries." She signaled to a young man in overlapping rings of black and red stripes. "My fiance," she told Ghyl. "He's a Functionary also, with excellent prospects, though we may have to move south to Ditzim."

Sonjaly had recovered from her fatigue; she and Nion were dancing now. Nion moved with a sure precision and far more gusto than Ghyl could summon. Sonjaly clasped his arm and leaned against him without regard for Floriel's sensibilities.

The music ended; Ghyl relinquished the girl in green scales to her fiance, drank a cup of wine to calm his nerves.

Nion and Sonjaly strolled off to the far side of the pavilion. Floriel scowled and muttered.

At the far end of the pavilion appeared another contingent of lords and ladies, the lords costumed variously: Rhadamese warriors, druids, Kalks, barbaric princes, mermen. One lady wore gray crystals; another blue flashes of light; another white plumes.

The musicians readied their instruments; once more there was music. A person in a cuirass of black enamel and brass, breeches striped ocher and black, a bronze and black morion came to bow before Sonjaly. With an arch glance toward Nion, Sonjaly swept away on the stranger's arm. A lord? wondered Ghyl. So it seemed. A prideful quality of conduct, a poise of head, identified him as such. Ghyl thought Nion appeared vexed.

So went the evening. Ghyl attempted the acquaintance of several girls with indifferent success. Sonjaly, when visible, kept to the company of the young lord in black, brown and brass. Floriel drank more wine than was good for

him and glowered here and there, against her body, which evidently, beneath the gown, was nude. Observing Ghyl's attention, she tilted her head teasingly sidewise. Ghyl's heart expanded, rose into his throat. Step by step he came forward, suddenly shy, though scenes of this sort had occurred a hundred times in his imagination: the girl seemed dear and familiar, and the instant fraught with *deja-vu*. The feeling became so intense that, a step or two away, Ghyl halted.

Shaking his head in perplexity, he considered the girl from the toes of her little white sandals to her white domino.

She made a sound of amused dismay. "You are so critical! Am I grotesque or startling?" Nion Bohart seemed even more vexed by Sonjaly's frivolity than did Floriel.

The atmosphere at the pavilion loosened. The dancers moved more freely, performing the measures with verve, toes splayed smartly aside, knees crooking sometimes grotesquely high, heads tilting and leaning, this way and that. Ghyl, through perversity or crochet, could not fall in with the general mood. He became disturbed and angry with himself. Was he so dour then, so tightly clenched, that he could not abandon himself to pleasure? He gritted his teeth, determined to out-gallant the gallants, through the exercise of sheer will, if by no other means. He walked around the periphery of the pavilion, to stop short near a delightfully-shaped girl in a white gown, wearing a white domino. She was dark-haired and slender, and very graceful; Ghyl had noticed her previously. She had danced once or twice; she had drunk a certain amount of wine; she had seemed as gay and wild as Ghyl wanted to be. Every movement pressed her gown

"No, no!" stammered Ghyl. "Of course not! You are absolutely enchanting!"

The corners of her mouth twitched, and she thought to beguile him even more utterly. "Surely others here are beautiful, but you stare only at me! I feel sure that you think me strange or remarkable!"

"Of course not! But I feel that we have met, that we have known each other . . . Somewhere . . . But I can't imagine the circumstances. I certainly would have remembered!"

"You are more than polite," said the girl. "And I would have remembered you, as well. Since I don't—" here she turned him her most bewitching glance. "Or do I? I seem to recognize—as you say—something familiar, as if somewhere we have known each other."

Ghyl stepped forward, his heart pounding, his throat heavy with a wonderfully sweet ache. He took her hands, which she yielded readily. "Do you believe in dreams of the future?"

"Well—yes. Perhaps."

"And predestination and mysterious kinds of love?"

She laughed, a delightful husky sound, and gave his hands a tug. "A hundred wonderful things I believe in. But won't folk think us strange, standing here at the ball and declaring our philosophies?"

Ghyl looked this way and that in confusion. "Well, then—will you dance? Or, if you like, we could sit over yonder and drink a cup of wine together."

"I would as lief drink wine . . . I really don't care to dance."

A startling new thought came to Ghyl, or rather, a bubble of certainly floating up from his subconscious. This

girl surely was no recipient; she was a lady! The Difference was manifest! In the quality of her voice, the poise of her head, the tart perfume which surrounded her!

Exhalted, Ghyl procured goblets of Gade wine and led the girl to a cushioned bench in the shadows. "What is your name?"

"I am Shanne."

"I am Ghyl." He turned her a searching side-glance. "Where do you live?"

She made an extravagant gesture; she was a vivacious girl, with hundreds of gay tricks and wry expressions. "Here, there, everywhere. Wherever I am, this is where I live."

"Of course. And I, as well. But do you live in the city—or up on an eyrie?"

Shanne held out her hands in mock despair. "Would you rob me of all my secrets? And if not secrets, my dreams? So I am Shanne, a girl vagabond, with no reputation or money or hope."

Ghyl was not deceived. The Difference was evident: that indefinable apartness which distinguished lords and ladies from the underfolk. A parapsychic umbra? An almost imperceptible odor, clean and fresh, like ozone, perhaps from long intimate contact with the upper air? Whatever the case, the effect was delightful. Ghyl squirmed at an uncomfortable thought. Might not the reverse be true? Might not the common folk seem louts, dull and lumpish, exhaling a stale reek? The lords who were so keen to seduce recipient girls could not think so. They panted after honest and unaffected passion. Perhaps the same situation prevailed *vis-a-vis* ladies and undermen . . . The idea was

unwelcome, in fact vaguely repugnant. Ghyl had never been seriously in love. His infatuation with Sonjaly now seemed stupidity. At this moment Sonjaly herself, again with Nion, danced close by. How coarse was Sonjaly in contrast to Shanne!

Shanne seemed at least favorably disposed toward him, for—wonder of wonders! she tucked her hand under his arm and leaned back with a sigh of relaxation, her shoulder touching his.

"I love the County Ball," said Shanne in a soft voice. "There is always such excitement, such wondering who you will meet."

"You've come before?" asked Ghyl, aching for all the experiences he had not shared with her.

"Yes, I came last year. But I was not happy. The person I met was—gross."

"'Gross'? How so? What did he do?"

But Shanne only smiled cryptically and gave his arm a companionable squeeze.

"The reason I ask," said Ghyl, "is so I won't perform any of the same errors."

Shanne only laughed, with just the slightest sense of restraint, so that Ghyl was left to wonder what indelicacies and crudities the man had performed.

Shanne jumped to her feet. "Come; this is music I like: a Mang serenade. I would like to dance."

Ghyl looked dubiously out at the floor. "It seems very complicated. I know almost nothing of dancing."

"What? Aren't you trained to leap and skip at the temple?"

The girl was a tease, thought Ghyl.

Well, he didn't mind. And his instinct was correct: she was certainly a young lady. "I have done very little leaping," said Ghyl. "As little as possible. In retribution Finuka has cursed me with a heavy foot, and I would not like you to think me clumsy. But there is a skiff at the dock; would you like me to row you out on the river?"

Shanne gave him a quick glance of calculation, ran the tip of her pink tongue over her lips. "No," she said in a thoughtful voice. "That would not be—advantageous."

Ghyl shrugged. "I'll try to dance."

"Wonderful!" She pulled him to his feet, and for a breathless second leaned against him so that he felt all the contours of her body. Ghyl's skin tingled; his knees felt warm and weak. Looking down into Shanne's face he saw her smile to the side, a slow secret smile, and Ghyl did not know what to think.

Ghyl danced no better than he had promised, but Shanne seemed not to notice and indeed did very little better, apparently not attending the rhythm of the music; once again Ghyl was assured that she was a young lady.

Of course! She would not row with him on the river for fear of kidnap; obviously she could not bring a Garrison into the skiff! Ghyl chuckled. Instantly Shanne's head bobbed up. "Why do you laugh?"

"Exhilaration," said Ghyl gravely. "Shanne the girl vagabond is the loveliest creature I have ever known."

"Tonight at least I am Shanne the girl vagabond," she said, somewhat wistfully.

"Tomorrow?"

"Sh." She put her hand across his lips. "Never say the word!" With a

quick look to right and left she led Ghyl through the crowd and back to their bench.

The revelry was approaching abandon. Dancers swayed, kicked, pranced, eyes glittering through their dominoes. Some made extravagant pirouettes; others paused to embrace, feverishly, oblivious to all else.

Intoxicated by color and sound and beauty as much as by the wine, Ghyl put his arm around Shanne's waist; she laid her head on his shoulder, looked up into his face. "Did you know that I can read minds?" she said in a husky whisper. "I like yours. You are strong and good and intelligent—but you are far, far, far too severe. What do you fear?" As she spoke her face was close to his. Ghyl, feeling as if he walked in a dream, bent close, close, closer; their faces met, he kissed her. Ghyl's whole inner being exploded. Never would he be the same, never again! How craven, how dull had been the Ghyl Tarvoke of old! Now nothing exceeded his competence; his previous goals—how abject they seemed! . . . He kissed Shanne again; she sighed. "I am shameless. I have known you only an hour."

Ghyl reached to her domino, lifted it, gazed into her face. "Much longer." He raised his own domino. "Do you recognize me?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

"Think back—eight years? Perhaps nine. You were on your space yacht: a black and gold Deme. Two ragamuffins skulked aboard. Now do you remember?"

"Of course. You were the defiant one. You rascal, but you deserved your beating."

"Very likely. I thought you so heart-

less, so cruel . . . So remote."

Shanne giggled. "I don't seem so remote now?"

"You seem—I can't find the word. But that wasn't the first time we met."

"No? When before?"

"When I was small my father took me to see Holkerwoyd's puppets. You sat in the front row."

"Yes. I remember. How strange that you should notice me!"

"How could I avoid it? I must have foreseen this moment."

"Ghyl . . ." She sighed, sipped her wine. "I do so love the ground! Here are the strong things, the passions! Oh you are lucky!"

Ghyl laughed. "You can't really mean that. You wouldn't trade your life—for, say, hers." He pointed to Sonjaly. The music had just stopped; Nion and Sonjaly were walking from the floor. Nion spied Ghyl; his stride slowed, he turned his head, stared, continued.

"No," said Shanne. "I would not. Do you know her?"

"Yes. Also the young man."

"The swaggerer. I watched him. He wasn't what—" Her voice dwindled away. Ghyl wondered what she had started to say.

For a period they sat quietly. The music started again; Sonjaly danced past with the lord in black and brown. In a kind of dreamy curiosity Ghyl looked for Floriel and Nion, but neither was visible.

"There goes your friend," whispered Shanne, "with someone I know. And shortly they will be gone . . ." She squeezed his arm. "I have no more wine."

"Oh! I'm sorry. Just a moment."

"I'll come with you."

They went to a booth. "Buy a whole flask," whispered Shanne. "The green."

"Yes, of course," said Ghyl.

"And then?"

She said nothing—a meaningful silence. Ghyl secured the wine, took her arm. They walked outside, along the riverbank. A hundred yards along Ghyl halted, kissed Shanne. She responded fervently. They wandered on, and presently found a stretch of grassy bank. Damar, at the quarter, laid a quivering trail of tarnished copper on the water.

Shanne removed her domino, Ghyl did the same; they drank wine. Ghyl stared at the river, then up to the moon. Shanne said, "You are quiet; are you sad?"

"In a way. Do you know why?"

She put her hand across his mouth. "Never speak of it. What must be, will be. What can never be—can never be."

Ghyl turned to look at her, trying to divine every last scintilla of her meaning.

"But," she added in a soft voice, "what can be—can be."

Ghyl drank from the wine bottle, set it down, turned to her, held out his arms. She held out hers, the two were one, and what ensued was as far beyond Ghyl's fantasies and musings as a magical reappearance of Emphyrio himself.

There was a pause, while the two sat pressed together. They drank wine. Ghyl's head whirled. He started to speak but once again Shanne halted him and rising on her knees, hugged his head to her bosom, and once again for Ghyl the skies reeled and Damar blurred in and out of focus.

At last there was calm. Ghyl held the

flask up against the moonlight. "Enough for you and for me."

"My head whirls," said Shanne.

"Mine as well." He took her hand. "After tonight, what?"

"Tomorrow I fly back to my tower."

"But when will I see you?"

"I don't know."

"I must see you! I love you!"

Shanne, sitting forward, clasped her knees with her arms, smiled up toward Damar. "In one week from today I travel. I travel, I travel, I travel! To distant worlds, beyond the stars!"

Ghyl cried out, "If you go, I'll never see you again!"

Shanne shook her head, her smile wistful. "Very likely that is so."

A harsh cold effluvium seethed up through Ghyl's veins and there turned to ice. He felt stiff, vaguely terrified: agast at the prospect of the future. He recovered control of his voice. "You provoke me to all sorts of outrageous conduct."

"No, no," said Shanne in her sweet whisper. "Don't ever consider it! You might be rehabilitated, or whatever dreadful thing they do to you."

Ghyl gave a slow fatal nod. "There is that chance." He turned to Shanne once more; he took her in his arms, kissed her face, her eyes, her mouth. She sighed, melted against him. Ghyl's mood was now less tender; he felt as old as Damar, wise in the lore of all the worlds.

At last they rose to their feet. Ghyl asked, "Where will you go now?"

"To the pavilion. I must find my father; he will be wondering where I am."

"Won't he be worried?"

"I don't think so."

Ghyl put his hands on the girl's

shoulder. "Shanne! Can we go off together, away from Ambroy? To South Continent! Or the Mang Islands! And there live our lives together?"

Shanne once more touched his mouth with her hands. "It would never be feasible."

"And I will never see you more?"

"Never more."

There was a sound behind them, a quiet footstep. Ghyl turned to look, to see a black hulk standing patiently beside the moonlit river.

"Just my Garrion," said Shanne. "Come, let us return to the pavilion."

Ghyl turned away. They walked back along the riverbank. Behind, at a discreet distance, came the Garrion.

Chapter 13

At the pavilion Shanne kissed Ghyl on the cheek, then, donning her domino, slipped off through the colored shadows to a group of lords and ladies.

Ghyl watched a moment, then turned away. How different seemed the universe! How strange seemed his life of a week ago! There was Floriel. Ghyl went to him. "Well then, here I am. Where is Sonjaly? Where is Nion?"

Floriel gave a mirthless laugh. "You missed all the fun."

"Oh?"

"Yes. A lord in armor—perhaps you noticed him—took interest in Sonjaly. Nion resented his attentions. When the two went outside to walk along the riverbank Nion ran after them, though really it was no affair of his. Mine, if anyone's. Well, I went behind to watch. Nion challenged the lord; the Garrion seized him, beat him and threw him in the river. The lord went off with Sonjaly. Nion floated off downstream,

splashing and cursing. Splendid! I've seen no more of him."

Ghyl laughed: a caw of such harsh mirth that Floriel looked at him in wonder. "And how did you fare? I saw you earlier with a girl in white."

"Are you ready to leave?"

"Why not? A miserable evening. I'll not come to the County Ball again. It's all froth and frivolity, with not an ounce of true entertainment. Well, let us go."

They walked through the night to the dock, and Floriel sculled the skiff across the river. Damar had set; an ash-colored light welled up into the eastern sky. A lamp flickered in the main room of the cottage. Here sat Nion, huddled under a blanket, drinking tea. He looked up as Floriel and Ghyl entered, and gave a grunt of mingled greeting and disapproval. "So you've finally returned. What kept you so long? Do you know that a Garrion beat me and threw me in the river?"

"It serves you right," said Floriel. He poured tea, handed a cup to Ghyl. The three sat in brooding silence. Ghyl at last made a sound, halfway between a sigh and groan. "Life at Ambroy is futile. It is life wasted."

"Are you just now becoming aware of that?" asked Nion bitterly.

"Life is probably futile anywhere," remarked Floriel with a sniff.

"That's all that's keeping me at Ambroy," declared Nion. "That, and the fact that I can make a decent living here."

Ghyl clenched his hands around the cup. "If I had any courage—if any of us had courage—we'd go forth to find . . . something."

"What do you mean—'something'?" asked Nion in a cantankerous voice.

"I'm not sure. Something meaningful, something grand. The chance to work a remarkable good, to right a terrible wrong, to do high deeds, to inspire men for all time! Like Emphyrio!"

Nion laughed. "Emphyrio again? We worked him once for what he was worth, which wasn't much."

Ghyl paid no heed. "Somewhere the truth regarding Emphyrio exists. I want to learn the truth. Don't you?"

Floriel, more perceptive than Nion, surveyed Ghyl curiously. "Why does this mean so much to you?"

"Emphyrio has haunted me all my life. My father died on the same account; he thought of himself as Emphyrio. He wanted to bring truth to Ambroy. Why else did he dare so much?"

Nion shrugged. "You'll never grease your pan with 'truth'." He glanced at Ghyl appraisingly. "The girl you were sitting with—wasn't she a lady?"

"Yes. Shanne." Ghyl uttered the name softly.

"She seemed attractive, judging from her figure. Are you seeing her again?"

"She's going traveling. I'll be left behind."

Nion looked at him with raised eyebrows. He gave a sour little bark of a laugh. "I do believe," he told Floriel, "that the lad's smitten!"

Floriel, still smarting over Sonjaly's faithlessness, was not particularly interested. "I suppose it happens."

Nion addressed Ghyl in an earnest, if condescending, voice. "My dear fellow, you should never take these people seriously! Why do you think they come to the County Ball? No other reason but to have a little fling. They purge themselves of tension and

emotion; after all, they live unnatural lives up on those eyries. They detest each other's vanity and arrogance and chill. Hence they come down to the County Ball and warm themselves at the fire of honest passion!"

"Nonsense," muttered Ghyl. "The situation was not at all like this."

"Ha! Did she say she loved you?"

"No."

"Did she show any shyness or reluctance?"

"No."

"Did she agree to see you again?"

"No. But she'll be traveling in a short time. She explained it all to me."

"Oh?" Nion pulled thoughtfully at his chin. "She told you when she was departing?"

"Yes."

"And when will it be?"

Ghyl looked sharply at Nion Bohart whose voice had suddenly become far too casual. "Why do you ask?"

"I have my reasons . . . Peculiar that she should be so confiding. They're usually the most secretive of folk. You must have plucked at her heart-strings."

Ghyl gave a hollow laugh. "I doubt if she has a heart."

Nion considered a moment, then looked at Floriel. "Would you be ready?"

Floriel grimaced. "As ready as I'll ever be. But we don't know when they dehark, or from where."

"Presumably at the Godero space-port."

"Presumably. But we don't know the host." Floriel looked at Ghyl. "Did she mention what kind of space-yacht she would travel in?"

"I know the space-yacht."

Nion jumped to his feet. "Do you

then? Wonderful! Our problems are solved. What about it? Would you care to join us in a venture?"

"You mean, to steal the space-yacht?"

"Yes. It is an unusual opportunity. We know, or rather you know, the departure date: when the yacht will be fueled and victualled and crewed and ready for space. All we need do is step aboard and take charge."

Ghyl nodded. "What then?"

Nion hesitated a barely perceptible instant. "Well—we'll try to ransom our captives; that's only reasonable."

"They won't ransom themselves any more; they've compacted together."

"So I'm told. Well, if they won't pay, they won't pay. We can drop them off on Morgan or some such spot, and then fly off in search of wealth and adventure."

Ghyl sipped his tea, and looked out at the flowing river. What was there left for him in Ambroy? A lifetime of wood-carving and Schute Cohol's admonitions? Shanne? Had she, after all, thought of him no more than a maudlin brute? If she thought of him at all.

Ghyl winced. He said slowly, "I'd like to take the space-yacht, if only to find the Historian who knows the entire history of the human race."

Floriel gave an indulgent laugh. "He wants to scrutinize the life of Empyrio."

"Why not?" asked Nion easily. "This is his privilege. Once we've taken the space-yacht and earned a few vouchers, there's nothing in the way."

Floriel shrugged. "I suppose there's no reason why not."

Ghyl looked from one to the other. "Before I listen to another word, an

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absolutely fundamental matter: we must agree: no killing, no looting, no kidnaping, no piracy."

Nion laughed in exasperation. "We're pirates the minute we take the space-yacht! Why mince matters?"

"True."

"The lords will be carrying a large sum of money for their expenses," Floriel pointed out. "There is no reason why we should leave that to them."

"I agree there also. Lords' property is fair game. If we steal their space-yacht it is foolishness to hoggle at dipping into their pouches. But thereafter we prey on no one, perform no harmful acts; agreed?"

"Yes, yes," said Nion impatiently. "Now then, when does the space-yacht depart?"

"Floriel, what of you?"

"I agree, certainly. All we want is the yacht."

"Very well; a solemn compact. No killing—"

"Unless in self-defense," inserted Floriel.

"—no kidnaping, or plunder, or harm."

"Done," said Floriel.

"Done," said Nion.

"The space-yacht leaves in less than a week—a week from yesterday. Floriel knows the craft very well. It is a black and gold Deme, from which long ago we were ejected."

"Well, well, well," marveled Floriel.

"One other point," Ghyl went on. "Assuming that we succeed in seizing the yacht, who can navigate? Who can operate the engines?"

"No problem there," said Nion. "The lords don't navigate either; they use a crew of Lusch technicians, who will serve us obediently, so long as

their salaries are paid."

"So there," said Floriel, "all is decided. The space-yacht is as good as ours!"

"How can we fail?" demanded Nion. "We'll need two or three others, of course: Mael and Shulk, and Waldo Hidle; Waldo will find us our weapons. Wonderful! To a new life for all of us!" He held up his mug; the conspirators toasted their desperate venture in tea.

Chapter 14

Ghyl returned to Undle Square with the feeling of revisiting a place he had known long ago. A high overcast shrouded the sky, allowing an umber light to seep into the square. An unnatural silence hung in the air, the stillness before a thunderstorm. Few recipients were abroad, and these hurried to their destination, cloaks drawn up around their heads, like insects fleeing the light. Ghyl let himself into the shop, closed the door. The familiar odor of shavings and polishing oil came to his nostrils; bots buzzed against the windowpane. As always Ghyl turned a glance toward Amiante's bench, as if he half-expected someday to find there the dear familiar hulk of the man. He went to his own bench, and for several minutes stood contemplating the screen which now he would never complete.

He had no regrets. Already his old life seemed remote. How dull and constricted seemed that old life! . . . What of the future? It was formless, vacant: a great windy space. He could not begin to imagine the direction of his existence—presuming, of course, that the forthcoming act of piracy turned out successfully. He looked

around the shop. His tools and belongings, Amiante's accumulation of oddments—all must be abandoned. Except Amiante's old portfolio, which Ghyl could never give up. He took it from the cabinet, stood holding it irresolutely. It was too large to carry in its present condition. He made a parcel of the most valuable contents, those which Amiante had prized most dearly. As for the rest—he would simply walk away and never return. It was heart-wrenching. There were many memories to this room with the amber-paned windows, the shavings on the floor.

The next morning Nion, Floriel, Mael and Waldo Hidle came to the shop and the group formulated plans. Nion proposed a scheme which was simple and bold, with all the virtues of directness. He had noticed that Garrion were never halted at the wicket controlling access to the south area of the space-port, but passed back and forth unchallenged. The group would disguise themselves as Garrion and thereby gain access to the avenue along which the space-yachts were parked. They would conceal themselves near the black and gold Deme. When the Lusch crew came aboard, probably with a Garrion or two, the group, with due discretion and minimum violence—this at Ghyl's insistence—would overpower the Garrion, intimidate the crew, and take control of the yacht. Nion and Floriel wanted to wait for the lords, to let them board the ship, to take them as hostages and hold them for ransom. Ghyl argued against this proposal. "In the first place, the longer we wait the greater our chances of failure and rehabilitation. Secondly, the lords won't pay ransom; this is their compact, to protect themselves from kidnaping."

"Bah," said Nion. "They'll pay, don't worry about that. Do you think they'd be all that self-sacrificing? Not much."

Waldo Hidle, a tall sharp-featured young man, with rust-orange hair and pale yellow eyes, took Ghyl's side. "I'm for taking the ship and leaving fast. Once we make our move we're vulnerable. Suppose a message arrives and we don't make the correct response, or suppose we neglect some trifling formality? The patrol would be on us at once."

"That's all very well," said Nion. "Let's assume we escape with the ship. What are we going to use for money? We must be practical. Kidnapping is a means to earning the money."

Floriel added, "If they refuse to pay ransom, as Ghyl suggests, then we're in no worse case. We'll simply set them down somewhere."

"Also," said Nion, "they'll undoubtedly have sums of money on their persons, which we can use very nicely."

Ghyl could summon no convincing counter-argument, and after a good deal of further discussion, Nion's plan was adopted.

Every day the conspirators met in the shop, to practise the Garrion stance and mode of walking. Waldo Hidle and Nion secured Garrion masks and costumes; thereafter the rehearsals were done in costume, with each criticizing inaccuracies or falsities in the others' deportment.

On three occasions they paid discreet visits to the space-port and planned their precise mode of action.

The night before the critical day all gathered at the wood-carving shop and tried to sleep, with little success; all

were tense.

Before dawn they were awake, to tone their skins the purple-brown of the Garrion, and strap themselves into the now-familiar Garrion harness. Then, muffling themselves in cloaks, they departed.

Ghyl was the last to leave. For a moment he stood in the doorway looking back across the familiar old benches and tool-racks, tears making his eyes heavy. He shut the door, turned, followed his comrades.

Now they were committed. They were abroad in Garrion costume, which was irregulationary. If they were apprehended they would face a very searching inquiry at the very least.

Overtrend took them to the space-port, each touching his Garrion shoulder to the registry plate. At some time in the future each would be billed for the ride, but none would be on hand to pay: or so they hoped. Coming up into the depot they crossed the echoing old chamber, using their much-practised Garrion stride. No one glanced twice at them.

At the control wicket came the first test. The guard glanced across the counter with a blank expression, pressed the unlock button. The door slid ajar; the conspirators stalked out upon the south sector of the field.

They marched down the access avenue, past space-yacht after space-yacht, and took up stations behind the nose-block and rear structure of the ship next to the Deme, that same black and gold space-yacht from which Ghyl and Floriel so long ago had been ejected.

Time passed. The sun rose into the sky; a small red and black freighter sank down upon the north sector, to

he met by landing authorities.

Nion spoke in a husky voice: "Here they come." He indicated a group coming along the avenue: six Lusch crew-men, two Garrion.

The plan now devolved upon who entered the ship first: the crew or Garrion. The crew would not be armed, but if they witnessed a struggle they would surely raise an alarm. In the optimum situation the crew would hoard the ship while the Garrion paused outside an extra few seconds to release the nose chock or some other such small duty.

The optimum situation did not occur. The Garrion mounted the ramp, unlocked the port, turned and stood facing the avenue, as if alert for just such an assault as the conspirators had planned. The crew scrambled up the ramp and entered the ship. The Garrion followed. The port swung closed.

The marauders watched silently, taut with frustration. There had been no opportunity to act. The instant they had showed themselves, the Garrion would have brought weapons to bear.

"Well, then," hissed Nion, "we wait for the lords. Then—we must act!"

An hour passed, two hours, the conspirators fidgeting with nervousness. Then along the avenue came a little dray, loaded with gay cases and parcels: personal baggage. The dray halted under the Deme; an after hatch opened, a cargo flat descended, the cases and parcels were transferred and hoisted into the belly of the Deme. The dray returned the way it had come.

The air became heavy with imminence. Ghyl's stomach began to pull and jerk; it seemed that all his life had been spent crouched under a space-

yacht's nose-block.

"Here come the lords," muttered Floriel at last. "Everybody back."

Three lords and three ladies came along the avenue. Ghyl recognized Shanne. Behind marched two Garrion. Nion muttered to Floriel on one side of him, to Mael on the other.

The party turned off the avenue, ascended the Deme's hoarding ramp. The entry port opened.

"Now!" said Nion. He stepped forth, stalked up the ramp, the others behind him. The Garrion instantly seized their weapons, but Nion and Mael were ready. Energy struck from their guns; the Garrion toppled, rolled to the ground.

"Quick!" snapped Nion to the lords. "Into the ship! Cooperate as you value your lives!"

The lords and ladies retreated aghast into the ship; behind came Nion, Mael and Floriel, then Ghyl and Waldo.

They burst into the saloon. The two Garrion who had come aboard with the crew stood glowering and indecisive; then they rushed forward, clicking their mandibles. Nion, Mael and Floriel fired their weapons and the Garrion became steaming wads of dark flesh. The ladies began to wail in horror; the lords made hoarse sounds.

From the depot came the wail of a siren, hoarse and wild by turns; it appeared that someone in the tower had glimpsed the attack. Nion Bohart ran to the engine room, waved his weapon at the Luschein crew. "Take the ship aloft! We have taken control; if we are threatened you will die first!"

"Fool!" cried one of the lords. "You will kill us all! The tower has orders to shoot down any seized ship, no matter who is aboard; did you not

know that?"

"Quick!" bellowed Nion. "Up with the ship! Or we're all dead!"

"The coils are barely warm; the trans-gain system has not been checked!" wailed the Luschein engineer.

"Take us up—or I'll burn off your legs!"

Up went the ship, weaving and tottering on its unbalanced propulsors, and so perhaps was saved from destruction when the energy guns directed from the tower were brought to bear. Before this, the ship gained velocity and vanished into space-drive.

Chapter 15

Nion Bohart had assumed command of the ship, a fact tacitly accepted by his fellows and enforced upon the lords. He wore his authority with a swash-buckling swagger; but there was no doubting his earnestness, his dedication, and his pure pleasure in the success of the exploit.

He held his weapons upon the lords while Floriel searched them. He found no weapons, nor the large sums of money which had been expected.

"Well then," said Nion in a dire voice. "Where are your funds? Do you carry vouchers or valuta or whatever?"

The lord who owned the ship, a thin-faced saturnine individual in a suit of silver foil and pink velvet, with a gallant hat of silver mesh, turned a sneer of disgust upon Nion. "The money is in our luggage; where else?"

Nion, not at all disturbed by the lord's contempt, shoved his weapons back in his belt. "Names please?"

"I am Fanton the Overtrend. This is my consort, the Lady Radance; this is my daughter, the Lady Shanne."

"Very well. You, sir?"

"I am Ilseth the Spay; my consort, the Lady Jacinth."

"You, sir?"

"I am Xane the Spay."

"Good. You may all sit, if you are so inclined."

The lords and ladies remained standing a moment; then Fanton muttered something, and the group went to settees along the bulkhead.

Nion looked around the saloon. He gestured to the Garrion corpses. "You, Ghyl, you, Waldo: eject this rubbish."

Ghyl stood stiffly, burning with resentment. Certainly, in any group such as this, there was need for a leader; nonetheless, in Ghyl's opinion, Nion had arrogated this privilege to himself somewhat high-handedly. If now he obeyed the order without complaint, he thereby conceded Nion's authority. If he did not obey, he initiated contention. And he would gain Nion's instant and abiding hatred. So—submit or fight.

He decided to fight.

"The emergency is over, Nion. We began this venture as a group of equals; let's keep it that way."

"What's this?" harked Nion. "Do you object to unpleasant work?"

"No. I object to your giving orders in regard to the unpleasant work."

For a tense moment the two faced each other, Nion smiling but obviously discomfited. He snarled, "We can't bicker over every little detail; somebody has to give orders."

"In that case, let's rotate the leadership. Floriel can start, I'll take it next, or Mael, or you or Waldo—it makes no great difference. But let's keep our group an association of equals, rather than a captain and his followers." Ghyl, sensing that now

was the appropriate time to seek support, looked around to the others. "Do you fellows agree?"

Waldo spoke first, hesitantly. "Yes, I agree. There is no need for anyone to give orders, so long as we are not faced with emergency."

"I don't like orders," Mael agreed. "As Ghyl says, we're a group. Let's make the decisions together, then act."

Nion looked at Floriel. "What of you?"

Floriel licked his lips. "Well—I'll go along with whatever everyone else thinks."

Nion gave in gracefully. "Good enough. We're a group, we'll act as a group. Still, we've got to have rules and direction, otherwise we fall to pieces."

"No argument there," said Ghyl. "I suggest then that we confine our guests, passengers, prisoners—whatever they are—in staterooms, and hold a conference."

"Very good," said Nion, and then with heavy sarcasm: "Perhaps, Mael, you and Floriel will so confine our guests. I and Waldo, and Ghyl, if he so decides, will eject the corpses."

"A moment before you hold your conference," spoke Lord Fanton. "What are your designs in regard to us?"

"Ransom," said Nion. "As simple as that."

"In that case, you must revise your plans. We will request none. If we did, none would be paid. This is our law. Your piracy is in vain."

"Not altogether," said Nion, "even if what you say is true, we have possession of the ship, which represents wealth. If you pay no ransom we will take you to the man-markets on Wale.

The women will go to brothels, the men will work in the mines or gather silicon flowers on the desert. If, of course, you prefer this to ransom."

"'Preference' is not involved," said Ilseth the Spay, who seemed less absolute than Fanton. "This is the law, imposed upon us."

Ghyl spoke, to forestall Nion. "We'll discuss the situation at our conference. We intend no harm upon you, if you give us no trouble."

Nion said, "To the staterooms then, if you please."

The ship floated quietly in space, propulsors at rest, while the five young pirates sat at conference.

The question of leadership was first discussed. Nion Bohart was all sweet reason. "In a situation of this sort someone has to act as the coordinator. It is a matter of responsibility, of competence, of confidence and mutual trust. Does anyone want the job of leader? I don't. But I'm willing to tackle it because I feel responsible to the group."

"I don't want to be leader," said Floriel virtuously, with a rather malicious glance toward Ghyl. "I am quite content to let anyone competent take over the job."

Mael grinned uncomfortably. "I don't want the job, but on the other hand I don't want to do the dirty work, to run here and there while somebody plays king."

"Nor I," echoed Waldo. "Perhaps we do not really need a leader. It is easy enough to discuss and reconcile differences and arrive at a consensus."

"It means a constant argument," grumbled Floriel. "Much easier to give the job to a man we know to be

competent."

"There won't be arguments if we establish a set of rules and abide by them," said Ghyl. "After all, we are not pirates; we intend no pillage or desperate work."

"Oh?" inquired Nion. "How do you expect to exist? If we don't get ransom money, we have a space-yacht hut no means to maintain it."

"Our original compact was explicit," said Ghyl. "We agreed not to kill. Four Garrian are dead, unavoidably I suppose. We agreed to try for ransom; and why not, after all? The lords are parasites and fair game. But most importantly we agreed to use the space-yacht not for pillage or plunder but for travel! To the far worlds all of us have longed to visit!"

"All very well," said Floriel, with a glance at Nion, "but what do we eat when the provisions run out? How do we pay port fees?"

"We can let the ship for charter, we can convey folk here and there, perform explorations or special ventures. Surely there must be honest profit to be gained from a space-yacht!"

Nion shook his head with a quiet smile. "Ghyl, my friend, this is a cruel universe. Honesty is a noble word, but meaningless. We can't afford to be sentimental. We have committed ourselves; we can't back down now."

"This is not our original agreement!" said Ghyl. "We pledged: no killing; no plunder."

Nion shrugged. "What do the others think?"

Floriel said easily, "We have to live. I have no qualms."

Mael shook his head uncomfortably. "I don't object to theft, especially

from the rich. But I don't care to kill, or enslave, or kidnap."

"I feel about the same," said Waldo. "Theft in one way or another is a law of nature; every living thing steals from another, in the process of survival."

A slow quiet smile was forming on Nion's face. Ghyl cried passionately, "This is not our compact! We agreed to live as honest men, after taking the yacht. To break the compact would be intolerable! How could we trust each other? Did we not embark upon this venture to search for truth?"

"'Truth'?" harked Nion. "Only a fool would use such a word! What does it mean? I don't know."

"One aspect of truth," said Ghyl, "is the keeping of promises. That is what concerns us most at the moment."

Nion began: "Are you suggesting—" but Mael, jumping to his feet, held up his hands. "Let's not quarrel! It's insanity! We've got to work together."

"Exactly," said Floriel, with a scornful glance toward Ghyl. "We've got to think of the common good, and profit for everyone."

Waldo said, "But let's be honest with each other. No denying that we did make the compact, exactly as Ghyl states."

"Perhaps so," agreed Floriel, "but if four of us wish to make certain changes, must we all be thwarted because of Ghyl's idealism? Remember, the search for 'truth'—"

"Whatever that is," interjected Nion.

"—won't put food in our stomachs!"

"Forget my 'idealism' for a moment," said Ghyl. "I insist only that we keep to the terms of our compact. Who knows? We might do better as

honest men than as thieves. And isn't it better not to have to worry about apprehension and punishment?"

"Ghyl's got a sound point there," admitted Waldo. "At least we should give it a try."

"I've never heard of anyone making a good living with only a space-yacht," grumbled Nion. "And he sensible: who's to trouble us if we indulge in a few quiet confiscations?"

"Our compact was clear and definite," Ghyl reminded him. "No theft, no piracy. We've succeeded in our main enterprise: we now own a space-yacht. If five men such as we can't make a good honest living for ourselves, we deserve to starve!"

There was a silence. Nion made a mulish grimace of disgust. Floriel fidgeted and looked up and down, every which way but at Ghyl.

Mael said heavily, "Very well then. Let's give it a trial. If we don't make a go of it, we'll have to try something else—or perhaps split up."

"In that case," demanded Nion, "what of the space-yacht?"

"We could sell it and divide the money. Or cast lots."

"Bah. What a sorry state of affairs."

"How can you say that?" cried Ghyl. "We've succeeded! We've got our space-yacht! What more could we ask?"

Nion turned his back, went to look out the forward port. Floriel said, "We can still try for ransom. I say, tax the lords one at a time; winkle the truth out of them. I can't believe that they won't pay to save themselves from Wale."

"Let's talk to them, by all means," agreed Waldo, anxious to restore the bonds of cooperation and good-fellow-

ship.

Lord Fanton was the first brought back to the saloon. Eyes snapping with rage, he looked from one face to the other. "I know what you want: ransom! You will have none."

Nion spoke in a suave voice, "Surely you want to save yourself and your family from the man-markets?"

"Naturally. But I can pay no ransom, nor can my friends. So do your worst. You will get no more wealth from us."

"Only the value of your persons," said Nion. "Very well, return to your stateroom."

Xane the Spay was brought forth. Nion swaggered forward, hands on hips, but Ghyl spoke first. "Lord Xane, we wish to cause no one undue hardship, but we were hoping to collect ransom for your safe return."

Lord Xane held out his hands helplessly. "Hopes are cheap. I also have hopes. Will mine be realized? I doubt it."

"Is it literally true that you can command no ransom?"

Xane the Spay gave an embarrassed laugh. "In the first place we control very little ready cash."

"What?" demanded Mael. "With 1.18% of all the income of Ambroy?"

"Such is the case. Grand Lord Dugald the Boimare is a strict accountant. After he deducts for expenses, taxes, overhead, and other costs, there is little residue, believe me or not."

"I for one do not believe you," spat Floriel. "'Expenses'—'taxes'—do you take us for fools?"

Nion asked in a silky voice: "Where does all the money go? It is a sizeable sum."

"You must put your question to

Grand Lord Dugald. And remember, our law forbids the payment of as much as a twisted sequin in ransom."

Lord Ilseth the Spay made a similar statement. Like Fanton and Xane he declared that not a sequin of ransom could be paid.

"Then," said Nion grimly, "we will sell you on Wale."

Ilseth made a despairing gesture. "Isn't this carrying vindictiveness too far? After all, you have Lord Fanton's space-yacht and our funds."

"We want an additional two hundred thousand vouchers."

"Impossible. Do your worst." Ilseth departed the saloon. Nion called after him, "Don't worry; we will!"

Mael said gloomily, "They certainly are an obdurate group."

"Curious that they should plead poverty," mused Ghyl. "What in the world becomes of all their money?"

"I consider the statement an insolent lie," sniffed Floriel. "I feel that we should show them no mercy."

"It certainly seems strange," agreed Waldo.

"They'll bring a thousand vouchers apiece on Wale," said Nion briskly. "Five thousand or better for the girl."

"Mmph," said Floriel. "Nine thousand is a far cry from two hundred thousand, but it's better than nothing."

"So then: to Wale," said Nion. "I'll give orders to the Luesch."

Ghyl declared, "No, no, no! We agreed to put the lords off on Morgan! These are the terms of our compact!"

Floriel gave a wordless cry of outrage. Nion turned a smiling face toward Ghyl which was more sinister than a glare. "Ghyl, this is the third time you have obstructed the common will."

"The third time, rather, that I have

reminded you of your promises," retorted Ghyl.

Nion stood negligently, with folded arms. "You have brought dissension to the group, which is absolutely intolerable." He unfolded his arms and it could be seen that he held a hand-weapon. "An unpleasant necessity but . . ." He aimed the weapon at Ghyl.

Waldo cried, "Have you gone mad?" He struggled to his feet, grabbed for Nion's arm. The weapon discharged, directly into Waldo's open mouth, and he fell forward. Mael, clawing at his own weapon, jumped to his feet; he pointed the gun at Nion, but could not bring himself to shoot. Floriel dodged behind Nion, fired, and Mael spun to the deck. Ghyl leapt back into the engine room, drew his own weapon, aimed at Nion, but held his fire for fear of missing and sending a bolt through the hull. Floriel, against a settee, was more vulnerable; but again Ghyl could not bring himself to fire: this was Floriel, his childhood friend!

Nion and Floriel retreated to the forward part of the saloon. Ghyl could hear them muttering. Behind him the Luschein crew watched with terrified eyes.

Ghyl called out, "You two can't win. I can starve you. I control the engines, the food, the water. You must do as I say."

Nion and Floriel muttered at length together. Then Nion called out, "What are your terms?"

"Stand, with your backs toward me, hands in the air."

"Then what?"

"I'll lock you in a stateroom, put you down on a civilized planet."

Nion laughed harshly. "You fool."

"Starve then," said Ghyl. "Go thirsty."

"What of the lords? The ladies? Do they starve and go thirsty as well?"

Ghyl considered. "They can come afloat one at a time to eat, when necessary."

Again came Nion's jeering laughter. "Now I'll tell you our terms. Surrender, and I'll put you down on a civilized planet."

"Surrender? What for? You don't have any bargaining power."

"But we do." There was the sound of motion, a scuffle, low voices. Into the saloon walked Lord Xane the Spay, stiffly.

"Halt," said Nion. "Right there." And he raised his voice to Ghyl. "We have no great bargaining power, perhaps—but we have enough. You dislike killing, so perhaps you'll try to prevent the death of our guests."

"How do you mean?"

"We will kill them, one at a time, unless you agree to our terms."

"You would do no such heartless deed!"

The gun cracked; Lord Xane the Spay collapsed with his head burned black. "Do you now believe?" called Nion. "Next: the Lady Radance!"

Ghyl wondered: could he run forward and kill the two of them before he himself was killed? No chance whatever.

Nion spoke, "Do you agree? Yes or no?"

"Do I agree to what?"

"Surrender."

"No."

"Very well; we will kill the lords and ladies one by one, then blow a hole in the side of the ship, and all of us will die. You cannot win."

"We will proceed to a civilized planet," said Ghyl. "You may go

ashore. These are my terms."

There was more noise, footsteps, a whimper of fear. The Lady Radance staggered into the saloon.

"Wait!" cried Ghyl.

"Will you surrender?"

"I'll agree to this. We will proceed to some civilized planet. The lords, the ladies, and I will go ashore. The ship will be yours."

Nion and Floriel muttered a moment. "Agreed."

The space-yacht descended upon the world Maastricht, fifth planet of the star Capella: a destination chosen after careful and emotion-charged discussion between Lord Fanton, Ghyl and Nion Bohart.

Air composition and pressure had been justified; those who were to disembark had dosed themselves with toners, ameliorators and antigens specific against the biochemical complexes of Maastricht.

The saloon port opened, to admit a flood of light. Fanton, Ilseth, Radance, Jacynth and Shanne went into the entry chamber, alighted, to stand blinking and dazzled.

Ghyl did not dare to cross the saloon. Nion Bohart was vindictive and wicked; Floriel, now completely under his control, was no better. Ghyl retired into the engine room, opened the heavy-goods port. He dropped out parcels of food and water, then the lords' luggage, from which he had previously abstracted all the money: a large sum. Tucking his own bundle of belongings into his jacket, he dropped to the ground, and dodged behind the hole of a nearby tree, prepared for anything.

But Nion and Floriel seemed content to leave well enough alone. The

ports closed; the propulsors hummed; the yacht raised into the air, gathered speed and disappeared.

Chapter 16

The gold and black Deme was gone. Solitude was complete. The group stood on a vast savannah, confined somewhat to east and west by low sugarloaf humps of bald granite or limestone. The sky was a rich soft blue, completely unlike the dusty mauve sky of Halma. An ankle-deep carpet of coarse yellow stalks tipped with scarlet berries spread as far as the eye could reach, the color muting to mustard-ocher in the distance. Here and there stood clumps of dark shrubs, an occasional heavy black tree, all shags and tatters. It soon became apparent that the time was morning. The sun, Capella, hung halfway up the sky, surrounded by a zone of white glimmer: something like the light over an ocean, and the landscape to the east was shrouded in a bright haze.

Well, then, thought Ghyl: here was the far world he had yearned to visit all of his life. He gave a sardonic chuckle. Never in his wildest imaginings had he anticipated being marooned with two lords and three ladies. He appraised them, where they stood in the shade of a sponge bush, the lords still wearing their splendid garments and proud wide-brimmed hats. Again Ghyl was impelled to a snort of amusement. If he felt discomfited it was clearly nothing compared to the incongruous, almost farcical, spectacle presented by the lords. They spoke quickly among themselves, making nervous gesticulations, looking this way and that, but seeming to heed their most



serious attention toward the hills. Now they took note of Ghyl, inspecting him with glares of detestation.

Ghyl went to join them; they moved fastidiously back. Ghyl asked, "Does anyone know where we are?"

"This is Rakanga Steppe, on the planet Maastricht," said Fanton tersely and turned away, as if to exclude Ghyl from the conversation.

Ghyl asked politely, "Are there cities or towns nearby?"

"Somewhere; we do not know where," said Fanton over his shoulder.

Ilseth, a trifle less brusque than Fanton, said, "Your friends did their best to make our lot difficult. This is the wildest section of Maastricht."

"I suggest," said Ghyl, "that we let bygones be bygones. True, I was part of the group which confiscated your ship, but I meant none of you harm. Remember, I saved your lives."

"We are sensible of the fact," said Fanton coldly.

Ghyl pointed off across the far savannah. "I see a watercourse in the distance; at least a line of trees. If we go to this, and if it is a stream, it should eventually lead us to a settlement."

Fanton appeared not to hear and engaged Ilseth in an earnest discussion, both staring toward the hills with an expression almost of longing. The older women muttered together. Shanne looked at Ghyl with an unfathomable expression. Ilseth turned to the ladies. "Best that we verge to the hills, to escape these hellish open plains. With luck we can find a grotto or covered shelter of some kind."

"Aye," said Fanton. "We would not be exposed to the sky during the whole of a strange night."

"Ah no!" whispered Lady Jacinth in a voice of hushed horror.

"Well then, let us be off." Fanton bowed to the ladies, extended his arm in a brave flourish. The ladies, casting apprehensive eyes at the sky, scurried off across the savannah, followed by Lords Fanton and Ilseth.

Ghyl looked after them non-plussed. He called out, "Wait! The food and water!"

Fanton spoke over his shoulder: "Bring it."

Ghyl stared in mingled rage and amusement. "What! You want me to carry all of it?"

Fanton paused, inspected the parcels. "Yes, all. Even so, I doubt if there will be sufficient."

Ghyl laughed incredulously. "Carry your own food and water."

Fanton and Ilseth looked around, eyebrows lofted in irritation.

"Another matter." Ghyl pointed toward the hills, where a large hump-backed black beast stood watching. As they looked, it lifted up on its hind-quarters to gaze more intently. "That is a wild beast," said Ghyl. "It is quite possibly ferocious. You have no weapons. If you value your lives, do not march off by yourselves, without food or water."

Ilseth grumbled. "There is something in what he says. We have not much choice."

Fanton grudgingly returned. "Give me the weapon then, and you may carry the provisions."

"No," said Ghyl. "You must carry your own provisions. I am walking north, toward the river, which undoubtedly will lead to a human settlement. If you go to those hills you will suffer hunger and thirst, and will

prohably he killed by the wild beasts."

The lords frowned up toward the sky, looked north across the open savannah without enthusiasm.

Ghyl said politely, "I discharged your luggage from the yacht. If you have garments more durable I suggest you change into them."

The lords and ladies paid him no heed. Ghyl divided the provisions into three lots; with vast distaste the lords slung their share of the parcels over their shoulders, and so they set out.

As they trudged across the savannah, Ghyl thought: "Twice now I have saved these lords from death. Beyond all doubt, on the instant that I deliver them to civilization, they will denounce me for a pirate. I will be expelled, or whatever the local penalty. So then, what shall I do?"

Had Ghyl been less concerned for the future he might have enjoyed the journey across the savannah. The lords were a constant source of wonder. By turns they patronized and insulted Ghyl, then refused to acknowledge his existence. He was continually surprised by their superficiality and petulance, by their almost total inability to come to rational terms with their environment. They were in awe of open spaces and ran to reach the shelter of a tree. Their heritage, so Ghyl decided, was responsible for their conduct. For centuries they had lived like pampered children, required to make no decisions, forced to meet no emergencies. They were concerned, therefore, with little beyond the immediate moment. Their emotions, though dramatic, were never profound. After the first few hours Ghyl accepted their foibles with equanimity. But how to deliver them

safely to civilization and at the same time escape with a whole skin? The prospect of becoming a fugitive on a strange planet filled Ghyl with foreboding.

The lords immediately made it clear that they preferred night to day as a time for travel. With disarming candor they informed Ghyl that the spaces seemed not so vast, and the glare of brilliant Capella would thereby be avoided. But a number of sinister beasts roamed the savannah. Ghyl feared one in particular: a sinuous creature twenty feet long with a thin flat body and eight long legs. This he thought of as "the slinker", from its mode of movement. In the dark it could slide up to them unobserved and seize them in its claws. There were other creatures almost as horrid: short hounding beasts like metal barrels studded with spikes; giant serpents gliding on a hundred minuscule legs; packs of hairless red wolves, which twice forced the group to climb into trees. So despite the inclinations of the lords, Ghyl refused to travel after dark. Fanton threatened to go forward without him, but after hearing a set of ominous calls and hoots decided to remain near the protection of the weapon. Ghyl built a roaring fire under a big sponge tree and the group ate a portion of the food.

Now Ghyl broached the subject which was at the top of his mind. "I am in a peculiar position," he told Fanton and Ilseth. "As you know, I was a member of the group which thrust these inconveniences upon you."

"The fact is seldom out of my mind," said Fanton curtly.

"This then is my dilemma. I meant no harm for you or the ladies. I want-

ed only your yacht. Now I feel it my duty to help you to civilization."

Fanton, looking into the fire, responded only with a grim and ominous nod.

"If I left you alone," Ghyl went on, "I doubt if you would survive. But I also must think of my own interests. I want your word of honor that if I help you to security you will not denounce me to the authorities."

Lady Jacinth sputtered in outrage. "You dare make conditions? Look at us, our indignities, discomfort, and yet—"

"Lady Jacinth, you misunderstand!" exclaimed Ghyl.

Ilseth made an indifferent gesture. "Very well, I agree. After all, the man had done his best for us."

"What?" demanded Fanton in a passionate voice. "This is the spiteful lout who robbed me of my yacht! I promise only that he'll be well punished!"

"In that case," said Ghyl, "we shall separate, and go different ways."

"So long as you leave the weapon with us."

"Hah! I'll do nothing of the sort."

Ilseth said, "Come, Fanton, be reasonable. This is an unusual situation. We must be large-hearted!" He turned to Ghyl. "So far as I am concerned the piracy is forgotten."

"And you, Lord Fanton?"

Fanton gave a sour grunt. "Oh, very well."

"And the ladies?"

"They will remain discreet, or so I suppose."

A soft breeze came out of the dark, wafting a vile scent which caused Ghyl a prickling uneasiness. The lords and ladies seemed not to notice.

Ghyl rose to his feet and peered out into the darkness. He turned back to find the lords and ladies already composing themselves for rest.

"No, no!" he said urgently. "For safety we should climb the tree, as high as possible."

The lords gazed stonily at him, making no movement.

"As you wish," said Ghyl. "Your lives are your own." He stoked the fire with the limbs of a dead tree, evoking a peevish complaint from Fanton. "Must you make such a furious blaze? Fire is detestable."

"There are beasts out yonder," said Ghyl. "The fire will at least allow us to see them. And I urge that everyone climb the tree."

"Ridiculous, perched in the branches," declared Lady Radance. "How could we rest? Is there no consideration for our fatigue?"

"You are very vulnerable on the ground," said Ghyl politely. "In the tree you will not rest as well but you will be more secure." He scrambled up into the branches and wedged himself into a high crotch.

On the ground the lords and ladies muttered uneasily. At last Shanne jumped to her feet and climbed the tree. Fanton assisted Lady Radance; together they scrambled to a branch near Ghyl. Lady Jacynth, complaining bitterly, refused to climb higher than a heavy limb ten feet from the ground. Ilseth shook his head in exasperation and perched himself on another branch somewhat higher.

The fire burnt low. From the darkness came a set of thudding sounds, a far wail. Everyone sat quietly.

Time passed. Ghyl dozed fretfully. Halfway through the night he became

aware of a vile stench. The fire was almost dead.

There came a sound of heavy slow footsteps. A huge dark creature came padding across the turf. It paused beneath the tree with one foot in the embers. Then it reached up, plucked Lady Jacynth from the low branch and carried her off screaming horribly. Ghyl could not see to aim the weapon. All climbed higher and slept no more.

The night was long indeed. Fanton and Ilseth crouched in silence near the top of the tree. Lady Radance made an intermittent fluting sound, like the warbling of a petulant bird; from Shanne came an occasional forlorn wail. The air became cold and clammy with settling dew; Lady Radance and Shanne became still and stiff.

Finally a ribbon of green light formed across the eastern sky, expanding upward to become the rim of a pink suffusion; then a spark of intense white light, then a dazzling cusp, then a disk, as a Capella cleared the horizon.

Down from the tree came the haggard group. Ghyl made a fire, which he alone seemed to find cheerful.

After a glum breakfast, the five once more set off toward the north. To Ghyl's perplexity Lord Ilseth displayed neither grief nor shock at the loss of Lady Jacynth, nor did any of the others seem overly concerned. "What strange folk!" marveled Ghyl. "Do they have feelings or do they just play at life?" And he listened as the lords and ladies, recovering something of their aplomb, began to converse among themselves, ignoring Ghyl as if he did not exist. Fanton and Ilseth once more gestured toward the hills

and began to veer west, until Ghyl called them back to the original course.

About midmorning black clouds boiled up from the south. There were whistling gusts of wind; then a hail storm surpassing any of Ghyl's experience pelted the travelers with pebbles of ice. Ghyl stood with his arms over his head; the lords and ladies ran back and forth beating at the hailstones as if they were insects, while Ghyl watched in amazement.

The storm passed as suddenly as it had come; in an hour the sky was clear again; Capella blazed down upon the glistening savannah. But the lords and the ladies had become dismal, forlorn, black-hearted. Their wonderful broad-brimmed hats drooped, their slippers were torn, their filigreed garments were stained. Only Shanne, perhaps because of her youth, failed to become venomously cantankerous, and she began to trail back with Ghyl. For the first time since the pirates had taken the ship they spoke together. To Ghyl's utter amazement, he found that she had not recognized him as the young man of the County Ball; indeed she seemed to have forgotten the episode. When Ghyl recalled it to her memory she looked at him in perplexity. "But—what a coincidence! You at the Ball—and you here now!"

"A strange coincidence," agreed Ghyl sadly.

"Why are you so evil? A pirate, a kidnap! You seemed so trusting and innocent, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, you remember rightly. I could explain the change, but you would not understand."

"It makes no difference, one way or another. My father will denounce you as soon as we reach civilization."

Do you realize that?"

"Last night he and Ilseth agreed not to do so!" cried Ghyl.

Shanne gave him a blank look, and for a space said no more.

At noon they reached the line of trees, which indeed bordered a dank trickle of water. Late in the afternoon the trickle joined a shallow river, with a faint trail along the bank, and not long after the travelers came upon an abandoned village, consisting of a dozen huts of bleached gray timber leaning every which way. In the soundest of these Ghyl proposed to spend the night, and for once the lords agreed without controversy. The inner walls of the shack were sealed with a pasting of old newspapers, printed in characters illegible to Ghyl. He could not restrain a pang of illogical awe at the sight of so much duplication. Here and there were faded pictures: men and women in peculiar costumes, space-ships, structures of a sort unfamiliar to Ghyl, a map of Maastricht which Ghyl studied half an hour without enlightenment.

Capella sank in a glorious coruscation of gold, yellow, scarlet, vermillion, totally unlike the sad mauves and ale-brown sunsets of Halma. Ghyl built a fire on the old stone hearth, which irritated the lords.

"Need it be so warm, so bright, with all those little whips and welts of flame?" complained Lady Radance.

"I suppose he wants to see to eat," said Ilseth.

"But why must the fool toast himself like a salamander?" demanded Fanton crossly.

"If we had maintained a fire last night," Ghyl returned, "and if the Lady Jacinth had used my advice to

climb high in the tree, she might be alive now."

At this the lords and ladies fell silent, and their eyes flickered nervously up and down. Then they retreated into the darkest corners of the shack and pressed themselves to the walls: a form of conduct which Ghyl found startling. During the night something tried the rickety door of the cabin, which Ghyl had barred shut. Ghyl sat up, groped for his gun. From the embers in the fireplace came a faint glow. The door shook again; then outside Ghyl heard steps, and they seemed like the steps of a man. Ghyl followed the sound around the walls to a window. Silhouetted against the starlit sky he thought to see the shape of a human or near-human head. Ghyl threw a chunk of wood at the head. There was a thud, an exclamation. Then silence. Somewhat later Ghyl heard sounds at the front door: heavy breathing, scratching and scraping, a small squeak. Then once again silence.

In the morning Ghyl went cautiously to the door, opened it with the utmost care. The ground outside seemed undisturbed. There was no booby-trap over the lintel, no trip-string, no barbs or hooks. What then had been the meaning of last night's activity? Ghyl stood in the doorway, searching the ground for signs of a deadfall.

Lord Ilseth came up behind him. "Stand aside, if you will."

"A moment. Best make sure it's safe."

"Safe? Why should it not be safe?" Ilseth pushed Ghyl aside and strode forth. The ground gave way

under his foot. He snatched up his leg, and fixed to his ankle was a plump purple-cheeked creature like a fat fish or an enormous elongated toad. Ilseth ran wailing through the village, kicking and clawing at the thing on his ankle. Then he gave a sudden great caw of agony and bounded off across the landscape in great wild hops. He disappeared behind a row of feathery black bushes and was seen no more.

Ghyl drew a deep breath. He prodded with a stick and discovered four additional traps. Fanton, watching over his shoulder, said nothing.

Lady Radance and Shanne, moaning in perplexity and terror, at last were prevailed upon to come forth from the hut. The group cautiously departed the dreadful village and set forth along the bank of the little river. For hours they walked in the shade of tremendous trees with fleshy russet trunks and succulent green foliage. Hundreds of small openwork creatures, like monkey-skeletons, hung in the branches, rasping and chittering, occasionally dropping twigs; in and out of the sunlight shimmered air-snakes. Behind, from time to time, Ghyl thought to notice someone of something following. On other occasions a ripple, a turbulence in the water, seemed almost to keep pace with them. At noon these indications disappeared, and an hour later they came to cultivated country. Fields were planted to vines and bushes yielding green pods, bulbs of black pulp, gourds. Soon after they entered a small town: huts and cottages of unpainted timber in a long untidy straggle along the river, which at this point connected with a canal. The townspeople were small and

brown-skinned, with round heads, black eyes, harsh heavy features. They wore coarse brown and gray cloaks with conical hoods, long-toed leather slippers; each displayed cabalistic signs tattooed on his cheeks. They were not an affable people, and eyed the travelers with surly incuriosity. Fanton spoke to them sharply, and was answered in a language which Ghyl was surprised to find that he could understand, though the accent was thick.

"What town is this?"

"Attegase."

"How far is the nearest large city?"

"That would be Daillie—a matter of two hundred miles."

"How does one reach Daillie in the swiftest manner?"

"There is no swift manner. We have no reason for haste. Five days from now comes the water bus. You can ride to Reso and take the air-float to Daillie."

"Well then, I must communicate with the authorities. Where is the Spay system?"

"Spay? What is that?"

"The communication device. The telephone, the long-distance radio."

"We don't have any. This is Attegase, not Hyagansis. If you want all those trinkets and gimcracks, you better go there."

"Well then, where is this 'Hyagansis'?" demanded Fanton, at which the man and all the bystanders set up an uproar of laughter. "Isn't any Hyagansis! That's why!"

Fanton sucked in his cheeks, turned away. Ghyl asked, "Where can we stay for five days?"

"Bit of a tavern over by the canal, used by the tipplers and canal-tenders. Maybe old Voma will take care of you.

Maybe not, if she's been eating reebers. She gets too bloated to do much more than take care of herself."

The travelers limped to the tavern beside the canal: a strange place built of stained wood, with an enormous high-peaked roof, grotesquely high, from which crooked dormers thrust out in all manner of unexpected angles. One corner was cut away to provide a porch and diagonally in the corner of this porch, under a tremendous beam, was the entrance.

The tavern was more picturesque from without than within. The innkeeper, a slatternly woman in a black apron, agreed to house the group. She held out her hand, rubbing thumb to forefinger. "Let's see your money. I can't spare good food for those who will not pay, and I've never seen a more clownish set of loons, excuse my saying so. What happened to you? You jump from an air-dock?"

"Something of the sort," said Ghyl. With a side-look toward Fanton, he brought forth the money he had taken from Fanton's luggage. "How much do require?"

Voma inspected the coins. "What are these?"

"Interplanetary valuta," barked Fanton. "Have you never had off-world visitors?"

"I'm lucky to get some from off the canal and then they want me to write 'em a tab. But don't take me for a dolt, sir, because I'm inclined to outrages of the spirit, and I've been known to pull noses."

"Show us our rooms then. You will be paid, never fear."

The rooms were reasonably clean, but the food—boiled black tubers with a rancid odor—was beyond the lords'

eating. Ghyl asked, "These are 'reebers', no doubt?"

"Reebers they are and right. Tingled with pap and bug-spice. I can't touch them myself, or I pay for it."

"Bring us fresh fruit," suggested Fanton. "Or some plain broth."

"Sorry, sir. I can get you a pot of swabow wine, now."

"Very good, bring the wine, and perhaps a crust of bread."

So passed the day. During the course of the evening Ghyl, sitting in the pot-room, mentioned that they had walked down from the south, after leaving a wrecked air-boat. Conversation halted. "Down from the south? Across the Rakanga?"

"I guess that's what it's called. Something attacked us in the deserted village. Who or what would that be?"

"The Bouns, most likely. Some say they are men. It's why the village is deserted. Bouns got them all. Crafty cruel things."

The following day Ghyl came upon Shanne, strolling alone beside the canal. She made no protest to his joining her, and presently they sat on the bank, shaded from Capella by a tinkling silver and black disk-tree.

For a space they watched the canal boats ease past, powered by billowing square sails, in some cases by electric-field engines. Ghyl reached to put his arms around her, but she primly evaded him.

"Come now," said Ghyl. "When we sat by another river you were not so hoity-toity."

"That was at the County Ball: a different case. And you were not then a vagabond and a pirate."

"I thought that the piracy had

been put by the boards."

"No, indeed. My father plans to denounce you the instant we reach Daillie."

Ghyl raised on his elbow. "But he promised, he gave me his word!"

Shanne looked at him in smiling surprise. "You can't believe that he would hold to an agreement with an underling? A contract is struck between equals. He always intended that you should be punished, and severely."

Ghyl nodded slowly. "I see . . . Why did you warn me?"

Shanne shrugged, pursed her lips. "I suppose I am perverse. Or coarse. Or bored. There is no one to talk with but you. And I know that you are not innately vicious, like the others."

"Thank you." Ghyl rose to his feet. "I believe I will be returning to the inn."

"I will come along too . . . In so much light and air I easily become nervous."

"You are a bizarre people."

"No. You are—unperceptive. You are not aware of texture and shadows."

Ghyl took her hands and for a moment they stood face to face on the riverbank. "Why not forget you are a lady and come with me? It would mean sharing the life of a vagabond; you would be giving up all that you are accustomed to—"

"No," said Shanne with a cool smile for the opposite bank of the river. "You must not misunderstand me—as you most obviously do."

Ghyl bowed as formally as he knew how. "I am sorry if I have caused you embarrassment."

He walked back to the inn and sought out Voma. "I am departing. Here—"

he gave her coins"—this should cover what I owe."

She gazed slack-mouthed down at the coins. "What of the others? That sour Lord Fanton, he told me that you would pay for all."

Ghyl laughed scornfully. "What kind of a fool do you take me for? See that he pays his score."

"Just as you say, sir." Voma dropped the coins into her pouch. Ghyl went to his room, took his parcel, ran down to the canal, arriving just in time to leap aboard a passing barge. It was piled high with hides and tubs of pickled reebers and reeked with an offensive odor; nevertheless it was transportation. Ghyl came to an arrangement with the boatman and took himself and his parcel to the windward section of the foredeck. He settled himself to watch the passing countryside and considered his circumstances. Travel, adventure, financial independence: this was the life he had yearned for, and this was the life he had achieved. All but the financial independence. He counted his money: two hundred and twelve interplanetary exchange units: the so-called *valuta*. Enough for three or four months living expenses, perhaps more if he were careful. Financial independence of a sort. Rhyl leaned back against a bale of hides and looking up at the slowly passing tree-tops, mused of the past, the malodorous present, and wondered what the future would bring.

Chapter 17

A week later the barge verged alongside a concrete dock on the outskirts of Daillie. Ghyl jumped ashore, half-expecting to be greeted by welfare

agents, or whatever the nature of the local police. But the dock was vacant except for a pair of roustabouts handling lines for the barge and they paid him no heed.

Ghyl found his way to the street. To either side were warehouses and manufacturing plants built of white concrete, panels of blue-green ripple glass, soft convex roofs of white solidified foam: all glaring and flashing in the light of Capella. Ghyl set off to the northeast, toward the center of the city. A fresh wind blew briskly down the street, fluttering Ghyl's ragged clothes and, he hoped, blowing away the reek of hides and reebers.

Today seemed to be a holiday: the streets were uncannily empty; the clean crisp structures were silent; there was no sound except for the rush of the wind.

For an hour Ghyl walked along the bright street, seeing no single person. The street lifted over the brow of a low hill; beyond spread the immense city, dominated by a hundred glass prisms of various dimension, some as tall or taller than the skeletal structures of Vashmont Precinct, all glittering and winking in the blaze of Capella-light.

Ghyl set off down the sunswept street, into a district of cubical white dwellings. Now there were people to be seen: brown-skinned folk of no great stature, with heavy features, black eyes, black hair, not a great deal different from the inhabitants of Attegase. They paused in their occupations to watch as Ghyl passed; he became ever more conscious of the reek of hides, his stained off-world garments, his growth of beard, his untidy hair. Down a side street he

spied a market: an enormous nine-sided structure under nine translucent roof-panels, each of a different color. An aged man, leaning on a cane, gave him counsel and directed him to a money-changer's booth. Ghyl gave over five of his coins and received a handful of metal wafers in return. He bought local garments and boots, went to a public rest-room, cleaned himself as well as possible, changed clothes. A barber shaved and trimmed him to the local mode; cleaner and less conspicuous, Ghyl continued toward the center of Daillie, riding most of the way on a public slideway.

He took a room at an inexpensive hostelry overlooking the river and immediately bathed in a tall octagonal room paneled with strips of aromatic wood. Three children, shaved bald and of indeterminate sex, attended him. They sprayed him with unctuous foam, beat him with whisks of soft feathers, turned gushes of effervescent water over him, the first warm, the second cold.

Much refreshed Ghyl resumed his new clothes and sauntered out into the late afternoon. He ate in a riverside restaurant with windows shaded by screens much like those carved at Ambroy. Ghyl's interest, momentarily aroused, waned when he saw the material to be a homogeneous synthetic substance. It occurred to him that he had seen little natural material in Daillie. There were vast masses of concrete foam, glass, synthetic stuff of one sort or another, but little wood or stone or fired clay, and the lack invested Daillie with a curious sterility, a clean sun- and wind-swept emptiness.

Capella sank behind the glass towers. Dusk fell over the city; the interior

of the restaurant grew dim. To each table was brought a glass hulk containing a dozen luminous insects, glowing various pale colors. Ghyl leaned back in his seat and, sipping pungent tea, divided his attention between the luminous insects and the vivacious folk of Daillie at nearby tables. Rakanga Steppe, the Bouns of the deserted village, Attegase and Voma's Inn were remote. The events aboard the space-yacht were a half-forgotten nightmare. The woodworking shop on Undle Square? Ghyl's mouth moved in a wistful half-smile. He thought of Shanne. How pleasant it would be to have her across the table, chin on knuckles, eyes reflecting the insect lights. What sport they could have exploring the city together! Then traveling on to other strange planets!

Ghyl gave his head a wry shake. Impossible dream. He would be sufficiently fortunate if Lord Fanton, through impatience or press of circumstances, failed to lodge a complaint against him Had he remained with the group, always within eye-range, a continual reminder of outrages and offenses, nothing could have deterred Lord Fanton from charging him with piracy. But out of sight, out of mind: Lord Fanton might well conceive it beneath his dignity to exert himself against an underling Ghyl returned to the inn and went to sleep, certain that he had seen the last of Lord Fanton, Lady Radance and Shanne.

Daillie was a city vast in area and population, with a character peculiarly its own yet peculiarly fugitive and hard to put a name to. The components were readily identifiable: the

great expanses of sun-dazzled streets constantly swept by wind; the clean buildings essentially homogeneous in architecture, cleverly built of synthetic substances; a population of mercurial folk who nevertheless gave the impression of self-restraint, conventionality, absorption in their own affairs. The space-port was close to the center of the city; ships from across the human universe came to Daillie but seemed to arouse little interest. There were no enclaves of off-world folk, few restaurants devoted to off-world cuisines; the newspapers and journals concerned themselves largely with local affairs: sports, business events and transactions. Crime either was non-existent or purposely ignored. Indeed, Ghyl saw no law enforcement apparatus: no police, militia, or uniformed functionaries.

On the third day of his stay, Ghyl moved to a less expensive hostelry near the space-port; on the fourth day he learned of the Civic Bureau of Information, to which he immediately took himself.

The clerk noted his requirements, worked a few moments at an encoding desk, then punched buttons on a sloping keyboard. Lights blinked and flashed, a strip of paper was ejected into a tray. "Not much here," the clerk reported. "Enverios, a pathologist of Gangalaya, died last century. H.I. No? Here's an Emphyrio, early despot of Alme, wherever that is. H.I. Is that your man? There's also an Enfero, a Third Era musician."

"What of Emphyrio, despot of Alme? Is there further information?"

"Only what you have heard. And the H.I. reference, of course."

"What is 'H.I.'?"

"The Historical Institute of Earth, which provided the item."

"The Institute could provide more information?"

"So I would suppose. It has detailed records of every important event in human history."

"How can I get this information?"

"No problem whatever. We'll put through a research requisition. The charge is thirty-five bice. There is, of course, a wait of three months, the schedule of the Earth packet."

"That's a long time."

The clerk agreed. "But I can't suggest anything quicker—unless you go to Earth yourself."

Ghyl departed the Bureau of Information and rode by surface car to the space-port. The terminal was a gigantic half-bubble of glass surrounded by green lawn, white concrete runways, parking plats. Magnificent! thought Ghyl, recalling the dingy space-port at Ambroy. Nonetheless, he felt a lack. What could it be? Mystery? Romance? And he wondered if the lads of Daillie, visiting their space-port, could feel the awe and wonder that had been his when he had skulked the Ambroy space-port with Floriel . . . Perfidious Floriel. The train of thought thus stimulated set Ghyl to wondering about Lord Fanton. He had barely set foot into the terminal when his speculations were resolved. Hardly fifty feet away stood Shanne. She wore a fresh white gown, silver sandals; her hair was glossy and clean; nevertheless, she herself seemed haggard and worn, and her complexion showed an unhealthy pink flush.

Making himself inconspicuous behind a stanchion, Ghyl sought around the terminal. At a counter stood Lord Fanton and Lady Radance, both harsh

and gaunt, as if even now the hardships they had undergone preyed on them. They completed their transaction; Shanne joined them; the three moved off across the terminal, conspicuous even here, where travelers from half a hundred worlds mingled, for their aloofness and withdrawal: for the Difference!

Ghyl now felt assured that Lord Fanton had not denounced him to the authorities: in fact, Fanton probably believed that Ghyl had departed the planet.

Keeping a wary lookout, Ghyl conducted his own business. He learned that any of five different shipping lines would convey him to Earth, in whatever degree of luxury and style he chose. Minimum fare was twelve hundred bice: far more than the sum in Ghyl's possession.

Ghyl departed the space-port and returned to the center of Daillie. If he wished to visit Earth he must earn a large sum of money, though by what means he had not the slightest idea. Perhaps he would simply request the Bureau of Information to secure the information he sought . . . Thus musing, Ghyl strolled along the Granvia, a street of luxury shops dealing in all variety of goods, and here he chanced upon an object which diverted him completely from his previous concerns.

The object, a carved screen of noble proportions, occupied a prominent position in the display window of Jodel Heuriax, Mercantile Factor. Ghyl stopped short, approached the window. The screen had been carved to represent a lattice festooned with vines. Hundreds of small faces looked earnestly forth. REMEMBER ME, read the plaque. Near the lower right-hand

corner Ghyl found his own childhood face. Close at hand, the face of his father Amiante peered forth.

Ghyl's gaze seemed to blur; he looked away. When once more he could see, he returned to study the screen. The price was marked at four hundred and fifty bice. Ghyl converted the sum into valuta, then into Welfare vouchers. He performed the calculation again. A mistake, surely: only four hundred and fifty bice? Amiante had been paid the equivalent of five hundred bice: little enough, certainly, considering the pride and love and dedication which Amiante gave his screens. Curious, thought Ghyl; curious indeed. In fact—astonishing.

He entered the shop; a clerk in the black and white robes of a mercantile functionary, approached him. "Your will, sir?"

"The screen in the window—the price is four hundred and fifty bice?"

"Correct, sir. Somewhat costly, but an excellent piece of work."

Ghyl grimaced in puzzlement. Going to the cabinet, he inspected the screen carefully, to learn if it might have been damaged or misused. It seemed in perfect condition. Ghyl peered close, then all his blood turned cold and seemed to drain to his feet. He turned slowly to the clerk. "This screen is a reproduction."

"Of course, sir. What did you expect? The original is priceless. It hangs in the Museum of Glory."

Jodel Heurisx was an energetic, pleasant-faced man of early middle-age, stocky, strong and decisive in his manner. His office was a large room flooded with sunlight. There was little furniture: a cabinet, a table, a sideboard, two chairs and a stool. Heurisx

half-leaned half-sat on the stool; Ghyl perched on the edge of a chair.

"Well then, young man, and who are you?" asked Heurisx.

Chyl had difficulty framing a coherent statement. He blurted: "The screen in your window, it is a reproduction."

"Yes, a good reproduction: in pressed wood rather than plastic. Nothing as rich as the original, of course. What of it?"

"Do you know who carved the screen?"

Heurisx, watching Ghyl with a speculative frown, nodded. "The screen is signed 'Amiante'. He is a member of the Thurible Cooperative, no doubt a person of prestige and wealth. None of the Thurible goods come cheap, but they are all of superlative quality."

"May I ask from whom you obtained the screen?"

"You may ask, I will answer: from the Thurible Trading Cooperative."

"It is a monopoly?"

"For such screens, yes."

Ghyl sat a half-minute, chin resting on his chest. Then: "Suppose that someone were able to break the monopoly?"

Heurisx laughed and shrugged. "It is not a question of breaking a monopoly, but destroying what appears to be a strong cooperative organism. Why, for instance, should Amiante care to deal with a newcomer when he already has a good thing going for himself?"

"'Amiante' was my father."

"Indeed? 'Was', did you say?"

"Yes. He is dead."

"My condolences." And Jodel Heurisx inspected Ghyl with cautious curiosity.

"For carving that screen," said

Ghyl, "he received about five hundred bice."

Jodel Heurix leaned back in shock. "What? Five hundred bice? No more?"

Ghyl gave a snort of sad disgust. "I have carved screens for which I earned seventy-five vouchers. About two hundred bice."

"Astounding," murmured Jodel Heurix. "Where is your home?"

"The city Ambroy on Halma, far from here, beyond Mirabilis."

"Hmmm." Heurix plainly knew nothing of Halma nor perhaps of the great Mirabilis Cluster. "The craftsmen of Ambroy sell, then, to Thurible?"

"No. Boimarc is our trade organization. Boimarc must deal with Thurible."

"Perhaps they are one and the same," suggested Heurix. "Perhaps you are being cheated by your own folk."

"Impossible," muttered Ghyl. "Boimarc sales are verified by the guild-masters, and the lords take their percentage from this sum. If there were peculation, the lords would be cheated no less than the underlings."

"Someone enjoys vast profits," mused Heurix. "So much is clear. Someone at the top end of the monopoly."

"Suppose then as I asked before, that you were able to break the monopoly?"

Heurix tapped his chin with his finger. "How would this be accomplished?"

"We would visit Ambroy in one of your ships and buy from Boimarc."

Heurix held up his hands in protest. "Do you take me for a mogul? I am small beer compared with the Fourteen. I own no space-ships."

"Well then, can a space-ship be chartered?"

"At considerable expense. Of course the profit likewise would be large—if the Boimarc group would sell to us."

"Why should they not? If we offer double or triple the previous rate? Everyone gains: the craftsmen, the guilds, the welfare agents, the lords. No one loses but Thurible, who has enjoyed the monopoly long enough."

"It sounds reasonable." Heurix leaned back against the table. "How do you envisage your own position? As of now you have nothing further to contribute to the enterprise."

Ghyl stared incredulously. "Nothing but my life. If I were caught I'd be rehabilitated."

"You are a criminal?"

"In a certain sense."

"You might do best to disengage yourself at this moment."

Ghyl could feel the warmth of anger on the skin of his face; but he carefully controlled his voice. "Naturally I would like financial independence. But no matter about that. My father was exploited; he was robbed of his life. I want to destroy Thurible. I would be happy to achieve no more than this."

Heurix gave a short bark of a laugh. "Well, you can be assured I do not care to cheat you nor anyone else. Suppose, after due reflection, that I agree to provide the ship and assume all financial risks—then I believe that I should receive two-thirds of the net profit, and you one-third."

"That is more than fair."

"Come back tomorrow and I'll communicate my decision."

Four days later Jodel Heurix and Ghyl met at a riverside cafe where

the factors of Daillie consummated much of their business. With Heurisx was a young man, ten years or so older than Ghyl, who had little to say.

Heurisx said, "I have obtained the use of a ship: the *Grada*. It is larger than I had intended; on the other hand it costs no charter fee, and in fact belongs to my brother Bonar Heurisx." He indicated his companion. "We will participate jointly in the venture; he will convey a cargo of specialty instruments to Luschein, on Halma, where, according to Rolver's Directory, there is a ready market for such articles. There will be no great profit, but enough to defer costs. Then, you and he will take the *Grada* to Amhroy, to buy craft-goods in the manner you describe. The financial risk is reduced to a minimum."

"My personal risk unfortunately remains."

Heurisx tossed a strip of enamel upon the table. "This, when impressed with your photograph will identify you as Tal Gans, resident of Aaillie. We will dye your skin, depilate your scalp, and fit you with fashionable clothing. No one will recognize you, unless it be an intimate friend, whom you will no doubt take pains to avoid."

"I have no intimate friends."

"I consign you then to the care of my brother. He is somewhat more wayward than myself, somewhat less cautious: in short, just the man for such a venture." Jodel Heurisx rose to his feet. "I will leave the two of you together, and I wish you both good luck."

Chapter 18

Strange to return to Amhroy!
How familiar and dear, how remote and

dim and hostile was the ramshackle half-ruined city!

They had found no difficulties at Luschein, though the instruments sold for considerably less than Bonar Heurisx had anticipated, causing him despondency. Then up and around the planet, over the Deep Ocean, north beside the Baro Peninsula and Asalula, out over the Bight, with the low coast of Fortinone ahead. For the last time Ghyl rehearsed the various aspects of his new identity. Amhroy spread below. The *Grada* accepted a landing program from the control tower and descended upon the familiar space-port.

The landing formalities at Amhroy were notoriously tedious; two hours passed before Ghyl and Bonar Heurisx walked through the wan midmorning sunlight to the depot. Calling the Boimarc offices by Spay, Ghyl learned that, while Grand Lord Dugald was on the premises, he was extremely busy, and could not be seen without prior appointment.

"Explain to Lord Dugald," said Ghyl, "that we are here from the planet Maastricht to discuss the Thurible marketing organization; that it will be to his advantage to see us immediately."

There was a wait of three minutes, after which the clerk somewhat sourly announced that Lord Dugald would be able to give them a very few minutes if they would come immediately to the Boimarc offices.

"We will be there at once," said Ghyl.

By Overtrend they rode out to the far verge of East Town, a district of abandoned streets, flat areas strewn with rubble and broken glass, a few buildings yet occupied: a forlorn region not without a certain dismal beauty.

In a thirty-acre compound were two structures, the Boimarc administrative center and the Associated Guilds warehouse. Ghyl and Bonar Heurisx, passing through a portal in the barbed fence, proceeded to the Boimarc offices.

From a cheerless foyer they were admitted to a large room where twenty clerks worked at desks, calculators, filing devices. Lord Dugald sat in an alcove with glass walls, slightly elevated from the main floor, and, like the other Boimarc functionaries, appeared to be extremely busy.

Ghyl and Bonar Heurisx were taken to a small open area directly before Lord Dugald's alcove, under his gaze to a somewhat uncomfortable degree. Here they waited, on cushioned benches. Lord Dugald, after a swift glance through the glass, paid them no heed. Ghyl examined him with vast curiosity. He was short and heavy and sat slumped in his chair like a half-filled sack. His black eyes were close together; tufts of dark gray hair rose above his ears; there was an unnatural purplish overtone to his complexion. He was, almost comically, the realization of a caricature Ghyl had somewhere seen . . . Of course! Lord Bodhizzle, of Holderwoyd's Puppets! And Ghyl worked hard to restrain a grin.

Ghyl watched while Lord Dugald examined, one after another, yellow sheets of parchment, apparently invoices or requisitions, and stamped each with a handsome instrument topped with a great globe of polished red carnelian. The invoices, so Ghyl noted, were prepared by a clerk sitting before an illuminated inventory board, of a sort he had seen at Daillie; the stiff sheets so prepared were then presented to Lord Dugald for the validation of his personal stamp.

Lord Dugald approved the last of the requisitions and hung the stamp by its carnelian globe under his desk. Only then did he make a curt signal to indicate that Bonar Heurisx and Ghyl were to come forward.

The two stepped up into the glass-enclosed alcove; Lord Dugald signaled them to seats. "What is this of Thurible Association? Who are you? Traders, you say?"

Bonar Heurisx spoke carefully. "Yes, this is correct. We have only just arrived from Daillie, on Maastricht, in the *Grada*."

"Yes, yes. Speak then."

"Our research," Bonar Heurisx went on more briskly, "leads us to believe that Thurible Association is performing inefficiently. To be brief, we can do a better job with considerably greater return for Boimarc. Or if you prefer, we will buy directly from you, at a schedule also yielding greatly augmented profits."

Lord Dugald sat immobile except for his eyes, which flicked back and forth, from one to the other. Curtly he responded, "The suggestion is not feasible. We enjoy excellent relations with our various trading organizations. In any case, we are bound by long-term contracts."

"But the system is not to your best advantage!" Bonar protested. "I will offer new contracts at double payment."

Lord Dugald rose to his feet. "I am sorry. The subject is not open to discussion."

Bonar Heurisx and Ghyl looked at him crestfallen. "Why not give us a try, at least?" argued Ghyl.

"Absolutely not. Now, if you will please excuse me . . ."

Outside, walking west along Huss

Boulevard, Bonar said despondently, "So much for that. Thirible holds a long-term contract." After a moment's reflection he grumbled, "Obvious, of course. We're beaten."

"No," said Ghyl. "Not yet. Boimarc has contracted with Thirible, but not the guilds. We shall go to the source of the merchandise, and bypass Boimarc."

Bonar Heurisx gave a skeptical snort. "To what avail? Lord Dugald spoke with clear authority."

"Yes, but he has no authority over the recipients. The guilds are not bound to sell to Boimarc, craftsmen need not produce for the guilds. Any-one can go noncup as he wishes, if he cares to lose his welfare benefits."

Bonar Heurisx shrugged. "I suppose that it does no harm to try."

"Exactly my feeling. Well then; first to the Scriveners' Guild, to inquire about hand-crafted hooks."

They walked south through the old Merchants' Quarter into Bard Square, upon which most of the Guild-Houses fronted. Bonar Heurisx, who had been glancing over his shoulder, presently muttered, "We're being followed. Those two men in black capes are watching our every move."

"Special Agents," said Ghyl with a glum smile. "Hardly a surprise... Well, we're doing nothing irregular, so far as I know. But I'd better not appear too well-acquainted with the city."

So saying he halted, looked around Bard Square with an expression of perplexity and asked directions of a passerby who pointed out the Scriveners' Hall, a tall structure of black and brown brick with four looming gables of ancient timber. Evincing uncertainty and hesitation for the bene-

fit of the Special Agents, Ghyl and Bonar Heurisx considered the building, then chose one of the three portals and entered.

Ghyl had never before visited the Scriveners' Hall and was taken aback by the almost indecorous volume of chatter and hadnage, deriving from apprentice classes in rooms to either side of the foyer. Climbing a staircase hung with samples of calligraphy, the two found their way to the Guildmaster's office. In the ante-room sat a score of fidgeting, impatient scriveners, each clutching a case containing his work-in-progress.

In dismay Bonar Heurisx looked at the crowd. "Must we wait?"

"Perhaps not," said Ghyl. He crossed the room, knocked on a door which swung open to reveal an elderly woman's peevish countenance. "Why do you pound?"

Ghyl spoke in his best Daillie accent. "Please announce us to his excellency, the Guild-master. We are traders from a far world; we wish to arrange new business with the Scriveners of Amhroy."

The woman turned away, spoke over her shoulder, then looked back to Ghyl. "Enter, if you please."

The Scrivener Guildmaster, a waspish old man with a wild ruff of white hair, sat behind a vast table littered with hooks, posters, calligraphic manuals. Bonar Heurisx stated his proposal, to the Guildmaster's startlement. "Sell you our manuscripts? What an idea! How could we be sure of our money?"

"Cash is cash," declared Bonar.

"But—how absurd! We use a long-established method; this is how we have derived our livelihood for time

out of mind."

"All the more reason then to consider a change."

The Guildmaster shook his head. "The current system works well; everyone is satisfied. Why should we change?"

Ghyl spoke. "We will pay double the Boimarc rate, or triple. Then everyone would be even more satisfied."

"Not so! How would we calculate the welfare deduction, the special assessments? These are handled now with no effort on our part!"

"With all charges met you would still receive twice your previous income."

"What then? The craftsmen would become avaricious. They would work two times less carefully and two times as fast, hoping for financial independence or some such nonsense. They know now that they must use scrupulous care to secure an Acme or a First. If they were teased by prosperity and set up a great clamor, what of our standards? What of our quality? What of our future markets? Should we throw away security for a few paltry vouchers?"

"Well then, sell us your 'Seconds'. We will take them across the galaxy and dispose of them there. The craftsmen will double their income and your present markets are safe."

"And thereafter produce only 'Seconds', since they sell as well as 'Firsts'? The same considerations apply! Our basic stock-in-trade is high quality; if we abandon this principle we debase our merchandise and become mere triflers."

In desperation Ghyl exclaimed, "Well then, let us be the agent for your sales. We will pay the going rate,

we will pay twice this sum into a fund for the benefit of the city. We can clear ruined areas, finance institutes and entertainments."

The Guildmaster glared in outrage. "Are you attempting to deceive me? How can you do so much on the output of the scriveners?"

"Not just the scriveners alone! On the output of all the guilds!"

"The proposal is far-fetched. The old way is tried and true. No one becomes financially independent, no one becomes pompous and self-willed; everyone works meticulously and there is no contention or complaint. Once we introduce innovation, we destroy equilibrium. Impossible!"

The Guildmaster waved them away; the two left the Guild Hall in discouragement. The Special Agents standing nearby, discreet rather than surreptitious, watched with open curiosity.

"Now what?" asked Bonar Heurix.

"We can try the other important guilds. If we fail at least we will have tried our hardest."

Bonar Heurix agreed to this; they continued to the Jewellers Syndicate, but when finally they gained the ear of the Guildmaster and made their proposal, the response was as before.

The Glassblowers Guildmaster refused to speak to them; at the Lutemakers they were referred to the Bild Masters Conclave, eight months hence. The Enamel, Faience and Porcelain-workers' Guildmaster put his head into an anteroom long enough to hear their proposition, said "No" and hacked out.

"The Woodcarvers' Guild remains," said Ghyl. "It is probably the most influential; if we receive a negative response here, we might as well return

to Maastricht."

They crossed Bard Square to the long low building with the familiar facade. Ghyl decided that he dared not go in. The Guildmaster, while no intimate acquaintance, was a man with a keen eye and a sharp memory. While Ghyl waited in the street Bonar went into the office alone. The Welfare Specials who had been following approached Ghyl. "May we ask why you are visiting the guildmasters? It seems a curious occupation for persons new to the planet."

"We are inquiring after trading possibilities," said Ghyl shortly. "The Boimarc Lord would not listen to us; we thought to try the guilds."

"Mmf. the Welfare Agency would disapprove such an arrangement in any case."

"It does no harm to try."

"No, of course not. Where is your native planet? Your speech is almost that of Ambroy."

"Maastricht."

"Maastricht, indeed."

The after-work movement to the Overtrend kiosk had begun; people were pushing past. A lank well-remembered female figure loped by, then stopped short, turned to stare. Ghyl looked away. The young woman craned her neck, peered into Ghyl's face. "Why, it's Ghyl Tarvoke!" cawed Gedee Anstrut. "What in the world are you doing in that outlandish costume?"

The Welfare Specials leaned forward. One cried: "Ghyl Tarvoke? Have I not heard that name?"

"You have made a mistake," Ghyl told Gedee.

Gedee drew back, her mouth open. "I forgot. Ghyl Tarvoke went off with Nion and Floriel . . . Oh my!" She

put her hand to her mouth, hacked away.

"Just a moment, please," said the Welfare Special. "Who is Ghyl Tarvoke? Is that your name, sir?"

"No, no, of course not."

"Yes it is too!" shrieked Gedee. "You're a filthy pirate, a murderer. You are the terrible Ghyl Tarvoke!"

At the Welfare Agency, Ghyl was thrust before the Social Problems Clinic. The members, sitting in a long box behind desks of iron, examined him with expressionless faces.

"You are Ghyl Tarvoke."

"You have seen my identification."

"You have been recognized by Gedee Anstrut, by Welfare Agent Schute Cohol and by others as well."

"As you like then. I am Ghyl Tarvoke."

The door opened; into the room came Lord Fanton the Spay. He approached, stared into Ghyl's face. "This is one of them."

"Do you admit to piracy and murder?" the chairman of the Social Clinic asked Ghyl.

"I admit to confiscating the ship of Lord Fanton."

"Confiscate"? A pretentious word."

"My ambitions were not ignoble. I intended to learn the truth of the Emphyrio legend. Emphyrio is a great hero; the truth would inspire the people of Ambroy, who are sorely in need of truth."

"This is beside the point. You are accused of piracy and murder."

"I committed no murder. Ask Lord Fanton."

Lord Fanton spoke in a pitiless voice: "Four Garrion were killed, I know not by which of the pirates.

Tarvoke stole my money. We made a terrible march during which the Lady Jacinth was devoured by a beast and Lord Illeth was poisoned. Tarvoke can not avoid responsibility for their deaths. Finally he left us stranded in a equalid village without a check. We were forced to make the most unpleasant compromises before we reached civilization."

"Is this true?" the chairman asked Ghyl.

"I saved the lords and ladies from slavery and from death, severaltimes."

"But you originally put them into the predicament?"

"Yes."

"No more need be said. Rehabilitation is denied. You are sentenced to perpetual expulsion from Ambroy, via Bauredel. Expulsion will occur at once."

Ghyl was taken to a cell. An hour passed. The door opened; an agent motioned to him. "Come. The lords want to question you."

Two Garrion took Ghyl into custody. He was thrust into a sky-flitter, conveyed up through the sky toward Vashmont. Down to an eyrie the flitter descended, landing upon a blue-tiled terrace. Ghyl was taken within.

His clothes were removed; he was led stark naked into a high room at the top of a tower. Three lords came into the room: Fanton the Spay, Fray the Underline and Grand Lord Dugald the Boimarc.

"You have been a busy young man," said Dugald. "Exactly what did you have in mind?"

"Breaking the trade monopoly which strangles the folk of Ambroy."

"I see. What is this hysterical yammer in regard to 'Emphyrio'?"

"I am interested in the legend. It

holds a special meaning for me."

"Come, come!" demanded Dugald with surprising sharpness. "This cannot be the truth! We demand that you be frank!"

"How do I help myself telling other than the truth?" asked Ghyl. "Or anything but untruth, for that matter."

"You are quick as mercury!" stormed Dugald. "You shall not evade us, I warn you! Tell us all, or we will be forced to process you, so that you cannot help yourself."

"I have told the truth. Why do you not believe me?"

"You know why we do not believe you!" And Dugald motioned to the Garrion. They seized Ghyl, propelled him, sick and trembling through a narrow trapezoidal portal into a long narrow room. They seated him in a heavy chair, clamped him so that he could not move.

Dugald said, "Now we shall proceed."

The inquiry was over. Dugald sat sprawl-legged, looking at the floor. Fray and Fanton stood across the room studiously avoiding each others' eyes. Dugald suddenly turned to stare at them. "Whatever you heard, whatever you presumed, whatever you even conjectured must be forgotten. Emphyrio is a myth; this young would-be Emphyrio will shortly be less than a myth." He signaled the Garrion. "Return him to the Welfare Agency. Recommend that expulsion occur at once."

A black air-wagon waited at the rear of the Welfare Agency. Wearing only a white smock Ghyl was brought forth, thrust into the air-car. The port clanged shut; the air-car throbbed,

lifted and swept off to the north. The time was late afternoon; the sun swallowed in a bank of yeast-colored clouds; a wan and weary light batbed the landscape.

The air-car bumped to a landing beside a concrete wall which marked the Bauredel frontier. A brick road between two subsidiary walls led up to an aperture in the boundary wall. A two-inch stripe of white paint marked the exact Fortinone-Bauredel boundary. Immediately behind the stripe the aperture was stopped by a plug of concrete stained and spotted a horrid dull brown.

Ghyl was seized and turned out upon the brick road, between the walls which led to the frontier. A Welfare Special clapped on the traditional broad-brimmed black hat and in a portentous voice read the banishment decree: "Depart from our cherisbed land, oh evil man who have been proved guilty of great barm! Glorious Finuka has proscribed killing throughout the cosmic realm; thank Finuka then for the mercy to be bestowed upon you, more than you sbowed your own victim! You are then to be banished perpetually, and for all time, from the territory of Fortinone, and into the land of Bauredel. Do you care to leap a final rite?"

"No," said Ghyl in a husky voice.

"Go then as best you may, go with Finuka's aid into the land of Bauredel!"

A great concrete piston, entirely filling the alley, moved forward, thrusting Ghyl toward that single inch of Bauredel territory available for his occupancy.

Ghyl backed up against the piston, planted his feet against the crumbling brick. The piston thrust forward. Sixty

feet to the border. A film of sunlight, pale as lymph, slanted into the avenue, outlining uneven edges of the brick, framing the concrete plug of the portal with a black shadow.

Ghyl stared at the bricks. He ran forward, tugged at a brick, then another, then another, until his fingernails broke and his fingertips were bloody. By the time he found a loose brick, the piston had denied him all but forty feet of avenue. But after the first brick came up, others pulled up without difficulty. He rushed to carry the bricks to the wall, stacked them into a pile, ran back for more.

Bricks, bricks, bricks: Ghyl's head pounded; he gasped and wheezed. Thirty feet of avenue, twenty feet, ten feet. Ghyl scrambled up the pile of bricks; they collapsed below him; frantically he stacked them again, with the piston looming over his shoulder. Up once more, and as the pile gave way he scrambled to the top of the wall. The piston thrust upon the bricks. A crunch, a crush: the bricks compressed into a friable red cake.

Ghyl lay flat on top of the wall, concealed by the walls of the avenue and by the piston, ready to drop over into Bauredel territory should the Welfare Agents see fit to investigate.

Ghyl lay flat as a limpet. The sun fell behind clouds; sunset was a somber display of dark yellows, watery browns. A cold breeze blew in across the waste.

Ghyl could bear no sound. The machinery of the piston was silent. The Welfare Specials had departed. Ghyl rose cautiously to his knees, peered in all directions. Bauredel to the north was dark: a waste swept by a sibing wind. To the south a few far lights glimmered.

Ghyl rose to his feet, stood swaying. The air-car had departed; the shack which housed the piston machinery was dark, but Ghyl was only half-convinced that he was alone. The area was pervaded with terror. The thin wailing of the wretches expelled in the past still seemed to hang in the air.

Ghyl looked south toward Amhroy, forty miles distant, where the *Grada* represented security.

Security? Ghyl gave a hoarse laugh. He wanted more than security. He wanted vengeance: retribution for years upon years of fraud, dreary malice, the sadness of wasted lives. He dropped to the ground and started south across the harrens, toward the lights of the village. His legs, at first limp, regained their strength.

He came to a fenced pasture, where hiloa stalked sedately back and forth. In the dark, when aroused, hiloa had been known to attack men. Ghyl veered around the pasture and presently came to an unpaved road, which he followed to the village.

He halted at the edge of town. The white smock rendered him conspicuous: if seen he would be recognized for what he was, and the local Welfare Agent would be summoned . . . Ghyl moved stealthily through the shadows, down a side-lane and to the rear of the town's heer garden, where he conducted a careful reconnaissance. Dropping to his hands and knees he crawled around the periphery to where a portly gentleman had draped his heige and black cloak over the railing. While the gentleman engaged the harmaid in conversation, Ghyl took the cloak, and retreating under the trees threw it over his shoulders and drew the hood over his head, to hide his Daillic hair-cut. Across the square

he noted an Overtrend station with a concrete rail receding to the south.

Hoping that the portly gentleman would not immediately notice the loss of his cloak, Ghyl walked briskly to the station.

Three minutes later a car arrived; with a last look over his shoulder toward the heer garden Ghyl stepped aboard and was whisked south. Mile after mile after mile: into Walz and Batra, then Elsen and Godero. The car halted; Ghyl stepped out upon the sideway, was carried to the escalator, raised and discharged into the space terminal. He swung back the hood of the stolen cloak, advanced with a forthright tread to the north gate. The control officer stepped forward. "Identification, sir?"

"I have lost it," said Ghyl, striving for a Daillic accent. "I am from the *Grada*—that ship yonder." He leaned over the hook. "Here is my signature: Tal Gans. This official here—" Ghyl indicated a clerk, who stood nearby "—passed me through the gates."

The guard turned to the clerk indicated. "Correct?"

"Correct."

"Please be more careful with your papers, sir. They might be misused by some unscrupulous person."

Ghyl gave a lofty nod, and strode out upon the field. Five minutes later he was aboard the *Grada*.

Bonar Heurisx regarded him with astonishment. "I have been intensely concerned! I thought never to see you again!"

"I have had a fearful day. Only by chance am I alive." He told Heurisx of his adventures; and Heurisx, looking at him, marveled at the changes done in a single day. Ghyl's cheeks were hollow, his eyes hurned; he had put

the trust and hope of his youth forever behind him.

"Well then," said Bonar Heurix, "so much for our plans, which were chancy at best."

"Not so fast," said Ghyl. "We came here to trade; trade we will."

"Surely you're not serious?" demanded Heurix.

"Something may still be possible," said Ghyl. He went to his locker, threw off the white smock, donned dark Daillie trousers, a tight dark shirt.

Bonar Heurix watched in puzzlement. "We're not going forth again tonight?"

"I, not you. I hope to make some sort of arrangement."

"But why not wait till tomorrow?" complained Bonar Heurix.

"Tomorrow will be too late," said Ghyl. "Tomorrow I'll be calm, I'll be reasonable, I won't be desperate with anger."

Bonar Heurix made no response. Ghyl finished his preparations. Because of the officials at the control gate, he dared not carry the articles he might have wished, and so contented himself with a roll of adhesive tape, a dark heret over his shaved head. "I'll be gone possibly two hours. If I do not return by morning, you had best depart."

"All very well, but what do you plan?"

"Trade. Of one sort or another."

Ghyl departed the ship. He returned to the control gate, submitted to a lackadaisical search for contraband, and was issued a new landing permit. "Be more careful of this than the last, if you please. And mind the tavern girls. They'll importune, and you'll wake in the morning with a sour taste and never a coin in your pocket."

"I'll take care."

Ghyl once more rode Overtrend to East Town: by night the most forlorn and dismal of regions. Once again he approached the thirty acre compound surrounding the Associated Guilds warehouse and the Boimarc offices. Furtive as an animal, he approached the fence. The warehouse was dark save for a light in the guards' office. The Boimarc offices showed a set of illuminated windows. A pair of floodlights, to either side, shone across the compound, where during the day lift-trucks worked loading and unloading air-vans and drays.

Standing in the shadow of a broken signal stanchion, Ghyl examined the entire vicinity. The night was dark and damp. To the east were gutted ruins of ancient row-houses. Far south the Vashmont eyries showed a few high yellow lights; much closer he saw the red and green glimmer of a local tavern. In the compound, mist blowing in from the ocean swirled around the floodlights.

Ghyl approached the gate which was closed and barred, and undoubtedly equipped with sensor alarms. It offered no hope of access. He started around the periphery of the compound and presently came to a spot where wet earth had collapsed into a ditch, leaving a narrow gap. Ghyl dropped to his knees, enlarged the gap and presently was able to roll under the fence.

Crouching, sliding through the dark, he approached the Boimarc offices from the north. He peered through a window, into the empty rooms. There was ample illumination, but no sound, no sense of occupancy.

Ghyl looked right and left, hacked away, circled the building, cautiously

testing doors and windows, but as he expected all were locked. At the east end a small annex was under construction. Ghyl clambered up the new masonry to a setback in the main structure and thence to the roof. He listened. No sound.

Ghyl stole across the roof and presently found an insecure ventilator which he detached and so was able to drop down into an upper storage chamber.

Quietly he made his way to the ground floor, his senses sharp and questing, and at last peered into the main offices. Light exuded calmly, evenly from glow-panels. He heard the ticking of an automatic instrument. The room, as before, was empty.

Ghyl made a quick reconnaissance, taking note of the various doors, should he need to make a hurried exit. Then more confidently he turned back toward Lord Dugald's alcove. He peered behind the desk; there in its socket, hung the stamp. On the desk were new requisitions, as yet unvalidated. Ghyl took three of these, and going to the inventory mechanism, set himself to puzzle out the form and coding and the method by which the requisitions were printed. Then he studied the read-outs on the automatic inventory calculator.

Time passed. Ghyl essayed a few sample requisitions; then, referring constantly to the sample forms and the operator's schedule, he prepared a requisition. He checked it with care. So far as he could see—perfect.

He removed the evidences of his work and replaced the sample requisitions. Then, taking Lord Dugald's stamp from its socket, he validated the requisition.

And now: what to do with the

requisition? Ghyl studied a notice taped to the console of the computer: a schedule of lead times and deadlines, and verified his supposition: the requisition must be conveyed to the dispatcher in the warehouse.

Ghyl departed the offices the way he had come, not daring to use the doors for fear of exciting an alarm.

Standing in the shadows he looked across at the warehouse, which was dark except for lights in the watchmen's cabin.

Ghyl approached the warehouse from the rear, climbed up a ramp to the loading dock, went in a stealthy half-run to a corner of the building. He peered around and saw nearby the booth in which sat two guards. One knitted a garment, the other rocked back and forth with his feet on a shelf.

Ghyl backed away, walked along the dock, testing doors. All were securely locked. Ghyl heaved a sad sigh. He found a length of half-rotten wood, took up a position and waited. Fifteen minutes passed. The guard who knitted glanced at a timepiece, arose, flicked on a lantern, spoke a word to his comrade. Then he went forth to make his rounds. He came past Ghyl whistling tunelessly between his teeth. Ghyl shrank back in the shadows. The watchman stopped by a door, fumbled with his keys, inserted one in the lock.

Ghyl crept up behind, struck down with the length of wood. The guard dropped in his tracks. Ghyl took his weapon, his lantern, bound and gagged the man with adhesive tape.

With a final glance to right and left he eased open the door, entered the dark warehouse. He flashed the light here and there: up and down hales of merchandise, crates and boxes, in

bays marked *Acme, First, Second*. The despatcher's office was immediately to the left. Ghyl entered, turned his light along the counters, the desks. Somewhere he should see a sheaf of stiff yellow sheets . . . There, in a cubicle to the side. Ghyl stepped forward, inspected the requisitions. The top sheet was the earliest, carrying the lowest number. Ghyl removed this sheet, wrote its number on his own requisition, added it to the pile.

He ran back to the door. The watchman lay groaning, still unconscious. Ghyl dragged him into the warehouse, near a pile of crates. He lifted two crates to the floor, beside the watchman's head, disarranged the remaining crates. He replaced the lantern, the weapon, the keys, on the watchman's person, removed the adhesive bonds, and departed hastily.

Three-quarters of an hour later Ghyl was back aboard the *Grada*, to find Bonar Heurix taut with anxiety. "You've been gone so long! What have you accomplished?"

"A great deal! Almost everything! Or so I hope. We'll know in the morning." In exultation Ghyl explained the circumstances. "-and all 'Acmes' and 'Acme Reserve'! I ordered out the choicest goods in the warehouse! The best of the best! Oh what a trick to play on Lord Dugald!"

Heurix heard him aghast. "The risk! Suppose the substitution is detected?"

Ghyl gave a reckless fling of the arms. "Unthinkable! But still—we want to be ready to leave, and leave at once. I agree as to that."

"Never have I stolen a copper!" cried Bonar Heurix in distress. "I will not steal now!"

"We do not steal! We take—and pay!"

"But when? And to whom?"

"In due course. To whomever will accept the money."

Bonar sank into a chair, rubbed his forehead wearily. "Something will go wrong. You will see. Impossible to steal—"

"Excuse me: to 'trade'."

"—to steal, trade, swindle, whatever you care to call it, with such facility."

"We shall see! If all goes well, the drays will arrive soon after sunrise."

"And if all goes ill?"

"As I said before—be ready to leave!"

The night passed; dawn came at last. On tenterhooks Ghyl and Bonar Heurix waited, either for loaded drays or the black five-wheeled cars of the Special Agents.

An hour after dawn a port official mounted the loading ladder. "Ahoy, aboard the *Grada*."

"Yes, yes?" called Bonar Heurix. "What is it?"

"Are you expecting cargo?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, open your hatches, prepare to stow. We like to do things efficiently here at Ambroy."

"Just as you say."

Ten minutes later the first of the drays pulled up beside the *Grada*.

"You must rate highly," said the driver. "All 'Acmes' and 'Acme Select'."

Bonar Heurix made only a non-committal sound.

Six drays in all rolled up to the *Grada*. The driver of the sixth dray said, "You're cleaning us out of Acmes. I've never seen such a cargo. Everyone at the warehouse is wondering

about it."

"Just another cargo," said Ghyl. "We're full to our chocks; don't bring any more."

"Precious little more to bring," grumbled the driver. "Well then, sign the receipt."

Ghyl took the invoice and prompted by a sudden whimsey scrawled 'Emphyrio' across the paper.

Bonar Heurisx called to the crew: "Close the hatches, we're taking off!"

"Only just soon enough," said Ghyl. He pointed. "There come the Special Agents."

Up into the air lifted the *Grada*; on the field below a dozen Special Agents jumped from their black cars to stand looking after them.

Ambroy dwindled below; Halma became a sphere. Damar, lowering and purple-brown, fell back to the side. The propulsors whined more hoarsely; the *Grada* went into space drive.

Jodel Heurisx was stupefied by the quality and quantity of the cargo. "This is not merchandise; this is treasure!"

"It represents the hoard of centuries," said Ghyl. "All goods of 'Acme' grade. Notice this screen, the Winged Being—the last screen my father carved. I polished and waxed it after his death."

"Put it aside," said Jodel Heurisx. "Keep it for your own."

Ghyl shook his head glumly. "Sell it with the rest. It brings me melancholy thoughts."

But Jodel Heurisx would not allow Ghyl his sentimentality. "Some day you will have a son. Would not the screen be a fine present to make to him?"

"If such an unlikely event ever

comes to pass."

"The screen then is yours, and it will be kept in my home until you need it."

"Oh, very well. Who knows what the future holds?"

"The rest of the cargo we will convey to Earth. Why trifle with provincial markets? On Earth are the great fortunes, the ancient palaces; we will attract the money of connoisseurs. A sum shall be reserved for the Ambroy guilds. We shall deduct the expenses of the voyage. The remainder will be divided into three parts. There will be wealth for all of us. You shall be financially independent, Ghyl Tarvoke!"

Chapter 19

All his life Ghyl had heard speculation as to the provenance of man. Some declared Earth to be the source of the human migration; another group inclined toward Triptolemus; others pointed to Amenaro, the lone planet of Deneb Kaitos; a few argued spontaneous generation from a universal float of spores.

Jodel Heurisx resolved Ghyl's uncertainty. "You may be sure: Earth is the human source! All of us are Earthmen, no matter where we were born!"

In many ways the reality of Earth was at odds with Ghyl's preconceptions. He had thought to find a dismal world, the horizon spiked with rotting ruins, the sun a flaming red eye, the seas oily and stagnant from the seepage of ages.

But the sun was warm and yellow-white, much like the sun of Maastricht; and the sea seemed considerably more fresh than Deep Ocean to the west

of Fortinone.

The people of Earth were another surprise. Ghyl had been ready for weary cynicism, a jaded autumnal lassitude, inversions, eccentricities, subtle sophistications; and in this expectation he was not completely wide of the mark. Certain of the people he met displayed these qualities, but others were as easy and uncomplicated as children. Still others perplexed Ghyl by their fervor, the intensity of their conduct, as if the day were too short for the transaction of all their business. Sitting with Jodel Heurix at an outdoor cafe of old Cologne, Ghyl remarked upon the variety of people who walked past their table.

"True enough," said Jodel Heurix. "Other cities on other planets are cosmopolitan enough, but Earth is a universe in itself."

"I expected the people to seem old-sedate-wise. Some do, of course. But others—well, look at that man in the green suede. His eyes glitter; he looks right and left as if he were seeing everything for the first time. Of course, he might be an outworlder, like us."

"No, he's an Earthman," said Jodel Heurix. "Don't ask me how I know; I couldn't tell you. A matter of style: small signs that betray a man's background. As for his air of restlessness, sociologists declare that material well-being and psychic stability vary in counter-proportion. Barbarians have no time either for idealism or its opposite, psychosis. The people of Earth, however, concern themselves with 'justification' and 'fulfillment' and a few, such as, perhaps, that man in green, become over-intense. But there are enormous variations. Some devote their energies to visionary schemes. Others turn inward to become

sybarites, voluptuaries, connoisseurs, collectors, aesthetes; or they concentrate upon the study of some arcane specialty. To be sure, there are numerous ordinary folk, but somehow they are never noticed, and only serve to heighten the contrast. But then, if you remain on Earth for a period, you will discover much of this for yourself."

The *Grado*'s cargo was sold, and profitably. At Tripoli Ghyl took leave of Jodel and Bonar Heurix. He promised some day to return to Daillie. Jodel Heurix told him, "On that day my home will be your home. And never forget that I hold for you your wonderful screen: the 'Winged Being'."

"I won't forget. For now—goodbye."

"Goodbye, Ghyl Tarvoke."

Feeling somewhat melancholy, Ghyl watched the *Grado* lift into the windy blue African sky. But when the ship at last dwindled and disappeared, his spirits rapidly rose: far worse fates than to be on Earth for the first time, with the equivalent of a million vouchers in his pouch! Ghyl thought of his childhood: a time unreal behind a golden haze. How often he and Floriel had lain in the yellow grass on Dunkum's Heights, talking of travel and financial independence! Both, in separate ways, had achieved their ambition. And Ghyl wondered what region of space Floriel now wandered; whether he were alive or dead . . . Poor Floriel! thought Ghyl, to be so lost.

For a month Ghyl roamed Earth, exploring the cloud-towers of America, the equally marvellous submarine cities of the Great Barrier Reef, the vast wilderness parks over which air-cars were not permitted to fly. He visited the restored dawn-cities of Athens, Babylon, Memphis, medieval Bruges,

Venice, Regensburg. Everywhere, often light but sometimes so heavy as to be oppressive, lay the weight of history. Each trifling area of soil exhaled a plasm: the recollection of a million tragedies, a million triumphs; of births and deaths; kisses exchanged; blood spilled; the char of fire and energy; songs, glees, incantations, war-chants, frenzies. The soil reeked of events; history lay in strata, in crusts; in eras, continuities, discontinuities. At night ghosts were common, so Ghyl was told: in the precincts of old palaces, in the mountains of the Caucasus, on the heaths and moors of the north.

Ghyl began to believe that Earth-folk were preoccupied with the past, a theory reinforced by the numerous historical pageants, the survival of anachronistic traditions, the existence of the Historical Institute which recorded, digested, cross-filed and analyzed every shred of fact pertinent to human origin and development . . . The Historical Institute! Presently he would visit the Institute's headquarters in London, although—for some reason he did not care to analyze—he was in no great hurry to do so.

At St. Petersburg he met a slim blonde Norwegian girl named Flora Eilander who occasionally reminded him of Shanne. For a period they traveled together, and she pointed out aspects of Earth he had not before noticed. In particular she scoffed at his theory that Earth folk were preoccupied with the past. "No, no, no!" she told him with a delightful lilting emphasis. "You miss the whole point! We are concerned with the soul of events, the intrinsic essences!"

Ghyl could not be sure that he had

comprehended her exposition, but this was no longer a novelty. He found the people of Earth bewildering. In every conversation he felt a thousand subtleties and indirections, a frame of mind which found as much meaning in the unstated as the stated. There were, he finally decided, niceties of communication which forever would he denied him: allusions through twitches of mannerism, distinctions of a hundredth of a second between a pair of contradictory significances, nameless moods which must instantly be countered or augmented in kind.

Ghyl became angry with himself and quarreled with Flora, who compounded the situation by condescension. "You must remember that we have known everything, tried every pang and exhilaration. Therefore it is only natural—"

Ghyl gave a harsh laugh. "Nonsense! Have you ever known grief or fear? Have you ever stolen a space-yacht and killed Garrion? Have you known a County Ball at Grigglesby Corners with the lords and ladies coming forth like magicians in their wonderful costumes? Or stumbled through a rite at Finuka's Temple? Or looked down dreaming from the Meagher Mountains across old Fortinone?"

"No, of course; I have done none of these." And Flora, giving him a long slow inspection, said no more.

For another month they wandered from place to place: Abyssinia where the sunlight evoked aloes, bitumen, old dust; Sardinia with its olive trees and asphodel; the haze and murk of the Gothic north.

One day in Duhlin Ghyl came upon a placard which froze him in his tracks:

FRAMTREE'S ORIGINAL PERIPATEZIC ENTERCATIONERS

The Wonderful Trans-Galactic
Extravaganza!

Hear the blood-curdling
screams of the Maupte
Bacchanids!

Toggle at the antics
of Holkerwoyd's puppets!
Smell the authentic fetors
of two dozen far planets!

Much more! Much more!

At Casteyn Park, Seven days only

Flora was uninterested but Ghyl insisted that they instantly take themselves to Casteyn Park, and for once Flora was the one to be perplexed. Ghyl told her nothing other than that he had known the show in his childhood; there was nothing more he could tell her.

Beside a stand of giant oaks Ghyl found the same gaudy panels, the same placards, the same sounds and outcries he had known as a child. He sought out Holderwoyd's Puppet Show and sat through a mildly amusing revue. The puppets squeaked and capered, trilled topical songs, caricatured local personalities, then a group dressed as punchinello performed a series of farces.

After the show, leaving the bored but indulgent Flora in her seat, Ghyl approached the curtain at the side of the stage: it might have been the identical curtain that once before he had pushed through, and he fought the impulse to look over his shoulder to where his father must surely be sitting. Slowly he pulled aside the curtain and there, as if he had not moved during all the years, sat Holkerwoyd, mending a bit of stage property.

Holkerwoyd had aged; his skin was

waxen, his lips had drawn back; his teeth seemed yellow and prominent; but his eyes were as keen as ever. Seeing Ghyl he paused in his work, cocked his head. "Yes, sir?"

"We have met before."

"I know this." Holderwoyd looked away, rubbed his nose with a gnarled knuckle. "So many folk I've seen; so many places I've been: a task to set all out in order . . . Let me see. We met long years ago, on a far planet, in the ditch at the edge of the universe. Halma. It hangs below the green moon Damar, where I buy my puppets."

"How could you remember? I was a small boy."

Holkerwoyd smiled, wagged his head. "You were a serious fellow, puzzled at the way the world went. You were with your father. What of him?"

"Dead."

Holkerwoyd nodded without surprise. "And how goes your life? You are far from Ambroy."

"My life goes well enough. But there is a question which troubles me to this day. You performed the legend of Emphyrio. And the puppet was executed."

Holkerwoyd shrugged and returned to his mending. "The puppets are not useful forever. They become aware of the world, they begin to feel real. Then they are spoiled and must be destroyed before they infect the troupe."

Ghyl grimaced. "Puppets presumably are cheap."

"Cheap enough. But just barely. The Damarans are sly dealers, cold as steel. How they love the chink of valuta! To good effect! They live in palaces while I sleep on a cot, starting up at

odd noises." Holderwoyd became agitated and waved his mending in the air. "Let them lower prices, and lavish less splendor on themselves! They are deaf to all my remonstrances. Would you like to see Emphyrio once more? I have a puppet who is becoming perverse. I have warned and scolded but I continually find him looking across the footlights at the audience.

"No," said Ghyl. He hacked toward the curtain. "Well then, for the second time I bid you goodby."

Holderwoyd gave a casual wave. "We may yet meet again, though I suspect not. The years come fast. Some morning they'll find me lying stark, with the puppets climbing over me, peering in my mouth, tweaking my ears . . ."

Back at the Black Swan Hotel, Ghyl and Flora sat in the saloon bar, with Ghyl staring glumly into a glass of wine. Flora made several attempts to speak but Ghyl's mind had wandered far away, beyond Mirabilis, and he gave back monosyllabic answers. Looking into the wine he saw the narrow-fronted house on Undle Square. He heard Amiante's quiet voice, the thin scrape of chisels on wood. He felt the wan Ambroy sunlight, the mist drifting across the mudflats at the mouth of the Inse; he recalled the smells of the docks of Nobile and Foelgher, the gaunt Vashmont towers, the moldering ruins below.

Ghyl was homesick, even though Ambroy could no longer be considered home. Meditating Amiante's humiliation and futile death, Ghyl became so bitter that he turned the whole glass of wine down his throat. The decanter was empty. A waiter in a white apron, sensing Ghyl's mood, hastened to bring a new decanter.

Flora rose to her feet, looked down at Ghyl a second or two, then sauntered from the room.

Ghyl thought of his expulsion, of the looming piston, the crushed bricks, the hour he lay huddled on the wall while the sad twilight gathered around him. Perhaps he had deserved the punishment; undeniably he had stolen a space-yacht. Still, was not the crime justifiable? Did not the lords use Boimarc, or Thurible Cooperative, whatever the case, to swindle and cheat and victimize the recipients? Ghyl brooded and sipped wine, wondering how best to disseminate his knowledge to the recipients. Useless to work either through the guilds or the Welfare Agency; both were conservative to the point of obsession.

The problem required reflection. Ghyl turned the last of the wine down his throat and went up to his suite. Flora was nowhere in evidence. Ghyl shrugged. He would never see her again: this he knew. Perhaps it was just as well.

On the following day he crossed the Irish Channel to ancient London. Now, at last, he would visit the Historical Institute.

But the Historical Institute was not to be approached so easily. Ghyl's questions to telescreen Information met first, bland evasiveness, then a recommendation to a guided tour of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. When Ghyl persisted, he was referred to the Bureau of Weights and Measures, who passed him on to Dundee House. This proved to be the headquarters of some sort of intelligence agency, whose function Ghyl never fully understood. A clerk politely inquired the reason for his interest in the Historical Institute, whereupon Ghyl, controlling his

impatience, mentioned the legend of Emphyrio.

The clerk, a golden-haired young man with a crisp mustache, turned away and spoke a few quiet words, apparently to the empty air, then listened, apparently to the air itself. He turned back to Ghyl. "If you will remain at your hotel, an agent of the Institute will shortly make contact with you."

Half-amused, half-irritated, Ghyl set himself to wait. An hour later he was met by an ugly little man in a black suit and a gray cloak: Arwin Rolus, sub-director of Mythological Studies at the Institute. "I understand that you are interested in the legend of Emphyrio."

"Yes," said Ghyl. "But first: explain to me the reason for so much stealth and secrecy?"

Rulus chuckled, and Ghyl saw that he was not really ugly after all. "The situation may seem extravagant. But the Historical Institute, by the very nature of its being, accumulates a great deal of secret intelligence. This is not the Institute's function, you understand: we are scholars. Still, from time to time we are able to resolve difficulties for more active folk." He looked Ghyl up and down with an appraising eye. "When an outworlder comes inquiring about the Institute, the authorities ensure that he doesn't intend to homh the place."

"No danger of that," said Ghyl. "I want information, no more."

"Precisely what information?"

Ghyl handed him the fragment from Amiante's portfolio. Without apparent difficulty Rolus read the crabbled old characters. "Well, well, indeed. Interesting. And now you want to find what happened? How the story ended,

so to speak?"

"Yes."

"May I ask why?"

The Earthers were a suspicious lot! thought Ghyl. In a measured voice he stated: "I have known half the legend since my childhood. I promised myself that if I ever were able to learn the rest, I would do so."

"And this is the only reason?"

"Not altogether."

Rulus did not pursue the question. "Your home-planet is—" He raised his busy gray eyebrows.

"Halma. It is a world back of the Mirabilis Cluster."

"Halma. A remote world . . . Well, perhaps I can gratify your curiosity." He turned to the wall-screen, tapped with his fingertips to project a coded signal. The screen responded with a run of references, one which Rolus selected. "Here," he said, "is the entire chronicle, indited by an unknown writer of the world Aume, or, as some say, Home, about two thousand years ago."

The screen displayed a message, printed in Archaic. The first few paragraphs were those of Ghyl's fragment; then:

In the Cataclysm sat those without ears to hear, who owned no souls and knew neither ease nor fellowship. Emphyrio brought forth his tablet and called for peace. They gave alarms and waved green pennants. Emphyrio urged fellowship; without ears to hear and eyes averted, none would understand, and they waved blue pennants. Emphyrio pled for the kindness which differentiated man from monster, or lacking that, mercy. They broke the tablet of truth underfoot and waved red pennants. Then they lifted Em-

phyrio in their hands aloft, they held him high to a wall, and through his skull they drove a great nail so that he hung on the wall of the Catedemonon. When all had looked to see how fared the man who would have spoken truth, they took him down and under the heam where they nailed him, there in the crypt they immured him forever!

But what was their profit?

Who was the victim?

On the world Aume, or Home, the brutes of Sigil no longer wasted the land. They looked eye to eye and asked: "Is it true, as Emphyrio avers, that we are creatures for whom there is dawn and dusk, pain and pain's ease? Why then do we waste the land? Let us make our lives good; for we have none other." And they threw down their arms and retired to those places which were the most pleasant to them, and at once became the easiest of folk, so that all men wondered at their first fecocity.

Emphyrio died imploring the dark ones to the ways of man, and that they should curb their begotten monsters. They refuted him; they hung him to the wall on a nail. But the monsters, at first insensate, were now, through truth, of all folk the easiest. If there be here lesson or moral, it lies beyond competence of him who inscribes this record.

Chapter 20

A sheet printed with the message issued from the wall; Rolus handed it

to Ghyl, who read it a second time, then placed it with Amiante's fragment.

"The world Aume—is it Halma? Is Sigil the moon Damar?"

Rolus brought further information to the screen, in a script unfamiliar to Ghyl. "Aume is Halma," he said. "A world with a complicated history: do you know it?"

"I suspect not," said Ghyl. "We learn very little at Amhroy." He could not keep the bitterness from his voice. "Very little indeed."

Without comment Rolus read from the screen, occasionally expanding or interpolating. Two or three thousand years before Emphyrio, and long before men appeared, the Damarans had established colonies on Halma, using space-ships provided by a race of star-wanderers. But war came; the Damarans were expelled and forced back to Damar, where they contrived a means to destroy the star-wanderers. Through the facility of their procreative systems, the Damarans were able to duplicate whatever genetic material might be presented to their glands. They decided to produce an army of irresistible warriors, ruthless and ferocious, who would tear the star-wanderers into shreds. First they prepared a prototype, then built artificial glands to produce the creatures in quantity. When the army was assembled they sent it down from Sigil, or Damar, but isolated in their caves they had lapsed half a thousand years behind the times. The star-wanderers were gone, no one knows where, and men had arrived to take possession of the planet. The army from Damar seemed an act of wanton aggression. The Wirwan—to name the monsters—seemed like fiends from hell.

In certain details they were similar to their progenitors. They lacked an accurate sense of hearing, and communicated by means of radio waves. Emphyrio apparently devised a mechanism which translated human words into Wirwan radiation. He was the first man to communicate with the invaders. They were singularly innocent, he discovered, having been trained to one purpose. He made them aware of themselves; he corrupted their innocence, so to speak. Almost magically they became hesitant and retiring, and retreated into the mountains. Encouraged by his success, Emphyrio traveled across the gap to Sigil, hoping to pacify those who had despatched the army.

"Emphyrio's ultimate fate is uncertain," said Rolus. "The account you just read states that the Damarans drove a nail through his head and killed him. Another source declares that Emphyrio negotiated a truce and returned to Aume, where he became the first lord. There are other reports to the effect that the folk of Sigil held Emphyrio a prisoner in perpetuity, preserving him in a state of suspended life. The facts are uncertain. All is changed now. The Damarans produce puppets and mannikins in their artificial glands. The Wirwans, a forlorn race, survive on the slopes of Mount Meagher. The men are as you know."

Ghyl heaved a sigh. So then: the tale was told. Fortinone, scene of the early campaigns, was now placid. On Damar the puppet-makers catered to the tourists and bred puppets. And Emphyrio? His fate was uncertain. Ghyl recalled his childhood visit to the Meagher Mountains when he had traced

imaginary campaigns upon the topography. He had been more accurate than he ever could have dreamed.

Arwin Rolus was preparing to take his departure. "Is there anything more you wish to know?"

"Does the Institute collect information from Halma now? From Fortinone?"

"Yes, of course."

"You have a correspondent at Ambroy?"

"Several."

"Their identity is secret?"

"Of course. If they were known, they might be compromised. We are required to stay aloof from events. Not all are able to do this. Your father, for instance."

Ghyl turned to stare at Rolus. "My father? Amiante Tarvoke? Was he a correspondent?"

"Yes. For many years."

Ghyl took himself to a cosmetic surgeon. His nose was narrowed, bridged and peaked; his eyebrows set in a new slant. The tattoo on his shoulder was expunged; the prints of his tongue, fingers, palms and soles were altered. His skin was toned dull olive-bonze, his hair was dyed black and finally only the contents of his brain remained to identify him as Ghyl Tarvoke.

At Ball and Sons, Haberdashers, Ghyl fitted himself out with Earth-style garments and was astounded by the hologram. Who would associate this debonair young gallant with poor harried Ghyl Tarvoke of old?

Fictitious identification papers were hard to come by. Finally Ghyl called Dundee House and presently was connected with Arwin Rolus.

Rolus recognized Ghyl at once which caused Ghyl exasperation and uneasiness. Ghyl stated his requirements but Rolus was reluctant to offer assistance. "Please understand the Institute's position. We profess didactic dispassion and nonpartisanship in all circumstances. We record, analyze, interpret—but we do not interfere or promulgate. If I, as an officer of the Historical Institute, were to assist your intrigue, I would be intruding the Institute upon the flow of history."

Ghyl thought that Rolus had unnecessarily emphasized one of his phrases. Ghyl said quickly, "I did not mean this to be an official call. I thought only to turn to you, as my single acquaintance on Earth, for some quiet advice."

"I see," said Rolus. "Well, in that case—" he thought a moment. "Of course I know nothing of these matters. But—" a slip of paper issued from the wall-slot in Ghyl's room—"if you call this code, someone at least will listen to you without wincing."

"I also have a question for you in your official capacity."

"Well then. What is the question?"

"Where is the Cataudemnon, where on Damar?"

Rolus gave a brisk nod, as if Rhyl's question came as no surprise. "I will put the question into process; the information will reach you shortly and the service charge will be added to your hotel addition."

Ten minutes later a sheet of paper issued from the wall-slot. The message read:

"The Cataudemnon, hall of the war lords of ancient Sigil, now known as Damar, is a ruin in the

mountains ten miles southwest of the present Old City."

During the evening Ghyl made contact with the man whose code Arwin Rolus had supplied. The next day he picked up his new documents, and assumed the identity of Sir Hartwig Thorn, Grandee. He immediately booked passage for Damar, and the same evening departed Earth.

Chapter 21

Damar was an eery little world, half the diameter of Halma, but with one-sixth Halma's mass and two-thirds its surface gravity. There were great expanses of bog across the polar regions, mountains and crags of astonishing dimension in the middle latitudes, an arid zone where grew Damar's unique equatorial thicket: a tangle of barbs and tendrils ten miles wide and occasionally a half-mile high. What with bogs, crags, gorges and the thicket, there were few areas convenient for habitation. Garwan, the tourist center, and Damar Old City were at opposite ends of the Great Central Plain, this apparently a scar inflicted by the glancing blow of a meteor.

At Garwan were hotels, restaurants, baths, sporting areas: luxury in bizarre surroundings. Puppet theaters provided spectacle and diversion: farce, historical pageants, macabre drama, erotic display. The puppet performers were a special breed: handsome little creatures four or five feet tall, vastly different from the half-simian imps supplied to such as Holkerwoyd.

The Damarans themselves seldom ventured from their residences under the hills, upon which they spent pro-

digious fortunes. The typical residence was a complex system of chambers swathed in soft fabrics, illuminated with meticulous nicety. Silver light shone on gray and nacreous curtains; red, carmine and magenta were used against blues and pale pink. Globes giving off deep purple or plangent sea-green hung behind films and layers of gauze. The residences were never complete, always in the process of alteration and extension. On rare occasions a man whom the Damaran wished to please, or one who paid a sufficiently large fee, might be invited into a residence: a visit preceded by an extraordinary ritual. Twittering puppets bathed the visitor, sprayed him with mists, muffled him head to foot in a white robe, fitted him with sandals of white felt. Thus sanitized, deodorized and padded, he would be conducted along interminable vistas of hangings and draperies, into grottoes hung with waving webs and gauzes, through blue lights and gray-green lights, finally to emerge awed and bewildered, if by nothing else but the vast expenditures of wealth. The average excursionist, however, saw the Damarans only as silent shapes to the back of an office or shop.

Arriving at Garwan, Ghyle established himself at one of the 'Old Damar' hotels: a pyramidal heap of white domes and hemispheres, with a few small windows placed seemingly at random. Ghyl was lodged in two domed rooms on different levels, draped with panels of pale green, the floors cushioned by a heavy black carpet.

Leaving the hotel, Ghyl entered a tour and travel agency. On a shadowed balcony stood a Damaran, each eye-bulb glinting with a luminous star: a creature smaller, softer, more flexible

than a Garrion, but otherwise much the same. On the counter a screen responding to a radio-frequency projection showed luminous characters: "You wish?"

"I want to hire an air-car." The words became tremulous shapes on the screen, which the Damaran read at a glance.

The response came: "This is possible, though expensive. A tour by sight-seeing tube costs no more and is preferable, in safety and deluxe comfort."

"No doubt," said Ghyl. "But I am a scholar at a university of Earth. I wish to look for fossils. I want to visit the puppet factories and look through the old ruins."

"It is possible. There is a depletion fee upon the export of fossils. It is not advisable to visit the puppet factories, due to the delicacy of procedures. A visitor would not be amused. There are no ruins of interest. The sight-seeing tube will offer greater value, and will cost less."

"I prefer to hire an air-car."

"You must post a bond for the value of the car. When do you want it?"

"Early tomorrow morning."

"Your name?"

"Hartwig Thorn."

"Tomorrow morning the car will be at the back of the hotel. You may now pay three thousand one hundred standard valuta units. Three thousand is the deposit. It will be returned to you. The air-car charge is one hundred units a day."

Ghyl walked about the city for an hour or two. With the coming of evening, he seated himself in an open-air cafe, to drink ale imported from Fortinone. Halma swam up into the sky, an enormous amber half-disk.

vaguely marked with familiar outlines.

A man walked into the cafe, followed by a woman; each in turn was silhouetted against Halma. Ghyl altered the focus of his vision, watched the couple settle themselves at a nearby table. The man was Schute Cobol; the woman no doubt was his wife; they had come to Damar to spend their hoarded vouchers like any other recipients. Schute Cobol glanced at Ghyl, studied his Earth-style garments, muttered something to his wife, who likewise inspected Ghyl. Then they gave their attention to the menu. Ghyl, with a wry grin, looked up through the air toward Halma.

Chapter 22

The days and nights of Damar were short. After dining and musing long into the night over a map of Damar, Ghyl had hardly retired to his suite before the sky began to lighten.

He arose with a sense of fatefulness. Long ago Holkerwoyd had pronounced him 'fey': laboring under a burden of doom. He dressed slowly, aware of the weight. It seemed that his whole life had been directed toward this day.

The air-car was waiting on a stage behind the hotel. Ghyl examined the controls, decided that they were standard. He climbed in, latched the dome, hitched the control wheel up to a convenient position and locked it. He checked the energy level: the cells were charged; he touched the ON button, pulled up on the wheel. The car lifted into the air. Ghyl slid the wheel forward, tilted it back: the car slid up at a slant.

So far, so good. Ghyl sent the car higher, up over the mountains. Far to the south was the equatorial

thicket, a formless gray-brown smudge. Ghyl steered to the north.

The miles slipped past; the thin upper air hissed past the dome. Ahead glinted a single rime-crusted peak: a landmark. Ghyl steered to the north of the peak and saw ahead Damar Old City: an unlovely jumble of long sheds and warehouses. Instinctively preferring that his presence not be noted Ghyl dropped the air-car low, to within a hundred feet of the surface, and veered to the southeast of Old City.

He searched an hour before he found the ruins: a tumble of stone lost among the rocky debris of the mountainside.

He landed the air-car on a little flat of drifted gravel fifty yards from a low wall, and now Ghyl wondered how he had searched so long, for the structure was of monumental scope and walls were yet standing. He alighted and stood by the car, listening, to hear only the sigh of wind across the harsh surface of the scree. The Old City, ten miles distant, was a formless jumble of grey and white tablets. He could see no moving object, no sign of life.

He took his lamp and hand-gun, approached the broken wall, which was half-drifted over with soil. Beyond was a depression, then a heavier wall of lichen-stained concrete: cracked, sagging, but still upright. Ghyl moved closer, trying to control his awe. This was a hall of giants; Ghyl felt dwarfed and trivial. Still—Emphyrio had been a man like himself, with a man's courage and a man's fear. He had come to the Cata demnon—and then?

Ghyl crossed the fosse between the two walls and came to a portal, choked with rubble. He scrambled up and peered within, but the sunlight,

slanting across the sky, avoided the gap and he saw only black shadows within.

Ghul switched on his lamp, slid down over the debris, into a dank corridor cluttered with the drift of centuries. On the wall hung tatters of fabric spun, perhaps, from fibers of melted obsidian, stained with metal oxides. The patterns were crusted with grime, but nonetheless heroic. They reminded Ghyl of hangings he had seen elsewhere, in circumstances he could not recall . . . The corridor opened into an oval hall, the roof of which had collapsed. The floor was open to the sky.

Ghyl halted. He stood in the Cata-demonion. Here Emphyrio had confronted the tyrants of Sigil. There was no sound, not even the rasp of the wind, but the pressure of the past was almost tangible.

At the far end of the hall was a gap with tatters of ancient regalia to either side. Here might Emphyrio have been lifted and nailed to a beam—if this had indeed been his fate.

Ghyl crossed the floor. He halted, looked up at the stone beam over the gap. There was certainly a scar, an eroded hole, a socket. If Emphyrio had been suspended here, his feet would have stained the stone by Ghyl's feet . . . The stone was crusted with a gray efflorescence.

Ghyl walked under the beam, turned his flash down into the opening. Dust, debris, bits of dry vegetation clogged the first part of a wide set of stairs. Ghyl clambered through, flashing the light to all sides. "Under the beam where they had nailed him, there in their crypt did they immure him forever." The steps gave upon an oval chamber, with three passages leading

off into the darkness. The chamber was floored with a dull stone on which lay an undisturbed layer of dust. The crypt? Ghyl turned the light around the chamber, and walked in the direction where the crypt must lie. He looked into a long room, cold and still. On the floor, helter-skelter, were half a dozen cases molded of glass, coated heavy with dust. Each contained organic remains: chitinous plates; strips of withered black leather . . . In one of the cases was a human skeleton, the joints wasted apart, the bones collapsed. The vacant eyeholes looked up at Ghyl. In the center of the forehead was a round hole.

Ghyl took the air-car back to Garwan, set it down on the pad behind the hotel, collected his deposit. Then he went to his suite where he bathed and changed into fresh garments. He went to sit on the terrace overlooking the plaza. He felt flat, deflated. He had not expected to find what he had found. The skeleton had been anticlimactical.

He had hoped for more. What of the sense of portent with which he had started the day? His instinct had played him false. Everything had gone with footling ease, with such small difficulty and so little incident that the whole affair seemed shameful. Ghyl felt uneasy, dissatisfied. He had found the remains of Emphyrio: as to this there was no doubt. But drama? There was none. He knew no more than before. Emphyrio had died uselessly, his glorious life ending in failure and futility. But there was no surprise: so much had been set forth in the legend.

The sun fell behind the western hills. Garwan's silhouette, receding

domes, superimposed one on the other, pile on pile, was black against the ash-brown sky. From an alley beside the hotel came a dark shape: a Damaran. It sidled along the jetta hedge that bordered the terrace, halted to look across the plaza. Then it turned to examine the terrace, as if calculating the worth of the night's business. Avaricious, hyper-luxurious beasts, thought Ghyl, with every sequin, every voucher, every bice poured into their already extravagant residences. He wondered if in the old heroic days, during the time of Emphyrio, if the Damarans had been equally sybaritic

... The Cata demnon had suggested no great refinement. Perhaps in those days they had lacked the financial means to gratify their tastes ... Sensing Ghyl's attention, the Damaran turned its queer tufted head, stared for several seconds, the yellow-green star in the dull eyes expanding and contracting. Ghyl stared back, exploring a sudden startling speculation.

The Damaran abruptly turned, disappeared behind the hedge. Ghyl leaned back in his seat. He sat for a long while in a half-mesmerized state of detachment, while excursionists came, dined, departed. And the twilight faded to a luminous umber and disappeared.

The situation had a queer ambivalence. Ghyl swung between nervous amusement for his own whimsies, and a dreadful bleakness of spirit.

As an exercise in abstract logic the problem resolved into a starkly simple solution.

When the arguments were transposed into human terms, the force of the logic remained, but the solution implied such heart-breaking tragedy that it transcended belief.

Still: facts were facts. So many

curious little trifles which he had observed with wonder now became firm segments of an intricate whole. Ghyl gave a giddy wild laugh which drew glances of censure from a nearby group of Ambroy excursionists. Ghyl choked back his mirth. They would consider him a maniac. If he went to their table, told them his thoughts, how he would shock them! Their trip, for which they had saved all their lives, would be ruined. Would they welcome such knowledge?

Here was a new predicament: What should he do, what steps should he take?

There was no one to give him counsel; he was alone.

What, given the circumstances, would have been Emphyrio's course of action?

Truth.

Very well, thought Ghyl: it shall be Truth, and let the consequences fall where they may.

Another incidental thought occurred to him, nearly occasioning another outburst of lunatic mirth. What of his premonitions of destiny now? They had been fulfilled, ten times over.

Ghyl signaled for a menu and ordered his dinner. In the morning he would depart for Ambroy.

Chapter 23

Ghyl arrived at the familiar old Godero space-port late in the afternoon, Ambroy time. He waited until the excursionists had pushed off the ship, then strolled down the ramp in a manner of languid condescension, hoping to camouflage his inner trepidation.

The control official was a man of bitter disposition. He scowled at

Ghyl's Earth-style garments, studied his documents with discouraging skepticism. "Earth, is it? What do you do here in Ambroy?"

"I travel."

"Hmf. Sir Hartwig Thorn. A grandee. We have them here as well. It's all the same. The grandees do the traveling; the underlings work. Duration of stay?"

"Perhaps a week."

"There's nothing here to see. A day is sufficient."

Ghyl shrugged. "It well may be."

"Nothing but drabness and drudgery. You'll find no splendor here, save up on the eyries. Do you know they just raised our percentage? It's 1.46 percent now, when for so long it was 1.18. Do you charge a percentage on Earth?"

"A different system is in force."

"I take it that you are importing no duplicated, machine-manufactured or plagiarized articles for distribution either gratis or for profit?"

"None."

"Very well, Sir Hartwig. Pass on, if you will."

Ghyl walked out into the well-remembered hall. At a Spay booth he placed a call to Grand Lord Dugald the Boimarc, at his eyrie in Vashmont Precinct.

The screen displayed a white disk on a dark blue ground. A courteous voice spoke: "Grand Lord Dugald is away from his eyrie. He will be pleased for you to leave a memorandum of your business."

"I am a grandee of Earth, just now arrived. Where may I find Lord Dugald?"

"He attends a fete, at the eyrie of Lord Parnasse the Underline."

"I will call there."

A lordling, thin of face, with varnished black hair dressed in a fanciful sweep over his forehead, responded to the second call. He listened with exquisite hauteur, turned away without a word. A moment later Lord Parnasse appeared.

Ghyl put on a style of amused condescension. "I am Sir Hartwig Thorn, touring from Earth. I called to pay my respects to Grand Lord Dugald, and was referred to your eyrie."

Parnasse, thin and keen like the lordling, with a darkly florid complexion, examined Ghyl up and down. "I am honored to make your acquaintance. Lord Dugald is at my eyrie, enjoying an entertainment." He hesitated a barely perceptible instant. "I would be glad to welcome you to my eyrie, especially if your business with Lord Dugald is urgent."

Ghyl laughed. "It has waited many years, and could well wait a day or so longer; but I would be pleased to settle it as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir. You are where?"

"At the Godero space-port."

"If you will go to Bureau C and mention my name, a conveyance will be put at your disposal."

"I will arrive shortly."

It was the common assumption among ordinary recipients that the lords lived in splendor, surrounded by exquisite objects, breathing delightful odors, attended by beautiful youths and maidens. Their beds, by repute, were air-fluff and wildflower down; each meal was said to be a banquet of delicious confections and the choicest Gade wines. Even under the load of his preoccupations, Ghyl felt something of the old thrill and wonder as the

air-car rose toward the eyrie of Lord Parnasse. He was discharged upon a terrace enclosed by a white balustrade, with all the expanse of Ambroy below. Two wide steps led to an upper terrace, with the palace beyond.

Ghyl instructed the air-car to wait. He mounted the steps, approached the portal, beside which stood a pair of Garrion in dull red livery. Through tall windows swagged with golden-satin drapes a splendid assembly of lords and ladies was visible.

Ghyl entered the palace without challenge from the Garrion and halted to watch the lords and ladies at their entertainment. There was little noise. All spoke in fluttering arch whispers, and laughed, when they did so, almost soundlessly, as if each were vying to produce the most animation, the most entrancing visual display, with the least sound.

Ghyl looked around the room: elegance, certainly, and a subtle suffusion of light which disguised and dissembled rather than illuminated. The floor was a checker of moth-wing brown and mustard yellow. For furniture there were couches upholstered in bottle-green plush—to Ghyl's eyes of an eccentric and over-refined design, certainly not the work of the Ambroy furniture-makers. The walls were hung with tapestries, apparently imported from Damar. Splendor and luxury indeed, thought Ghyl, but there was also a curious intimation of shabbiness: the make-shift insubstantiality of a stage-set. The air, despite the soft lights and sumptuous drapes, lacked ease and richness; the activity lacked spontaneity. It was, thought Ghyl, like watching puppets play at festivity, rather than watching festivity itself. Small wonder, he thought, that lords

and ladies attended such functions as the County Ball, where they could participate in the passions of the underlings . . . As he thought of the County Ball, he saw Shanne, wearing a wonderful gown of muted lemon yellow, with ribbons and flounces of ivory. Ghyl watched in fascination as she stood talking in hushed half-whispers to a gallant young lord. With what charming eagerness did she perform her wiles: smiles, pouts, roguish tilts of the head, pretty little outrages, sham startlements, mock provocations, grimaces of delight, dismay, bewilderment, consternation.

A tall thin lord approached: Lord Parnasse. He halted, bowed, "Sir Hartwig Thorn?"

Ghyl bowed in return. "I am he." "I trust you find my eyrie to your liking?" Lord Parnasse's voice was light, siccant, with the faintest possible overtone of condescension.

"It is delightful."

"If your business with Lord Dugald is urgent, I will take you to him. When you have finished, you may enjoy yourself without restraint."

"I would not wish to presume upon your hospitality," said Ghyl. "As you see, I have ordered the air-car to wait. My business probably will require no great time."

"As you wish. Be good enough, then, to follow me."

Shanne had noticed Ghyl; she stared at him in fascination. Ghyl gave her a smile and a nod; it made no great difference if she recognized him. Puzzled and thoughtful, she turned to watch as Ghyl followed Lord Parnasse to a small side-room hung with blue satin. At a little marquetry table sat Grand Lord Dugald the Boimarc.

"Here is Sir Hartwig Thorn of

Earth who has a matter to discuss with you," said Parnasse. He gave a stiff bow, departed.

Grand Lord Dugald, portly, middle-aged, with a plum-colored complexion, stared at Ghyl. "Do I know you? You have aspects I find familiar. What was your name once more?"

"My name is irrelevant," said Ghyl. "You may think of me as Prince Emphyrio of Ambroy."

Dugald stared at him coldly. "This seems an over-extravagant joke."

"Dugald, Grand Lord as you are called, your entire life is an extravagant joke."

"Eh? What's this?" Dugald heaved himself to his feet. "What is all this about? You are no man of Earth! You have the voice of an underman. What farce is this?" Dugald turned to summon the Garrion who stood at the end of the hall.

"Wait," said Ghyl. "Listen to me, then decide what to do. If you call the Garrion now, you lose most of your options."

Dugald stared, his face an apoplectic purple, his mouth opening and closing. "I know you, I have seen you. I remember your way of speaking . . . Can it be? You are Ghyl Tarvoke, who was expelled! Ghyl Tarvoke, the pirate! The great thief!"

"I am Ghyl Tarvoke."

"I should have known, when you said 'Emphyrio'. What an outrage to find you here! What do you want of me? Revenge? You deserved your punishment!" Lord Dugald looked at Ghyl in new wrath. "How did you escape? You were expelled!"

"True," said Ghyl. "Now I am back once more. You destroyed my father, you set about to destroy me. I feel no great pity for you."

Lord Dugald once more turned toward the Garrion; once again Ghyl held up his hand. "I carry a weapon; I can kill you and the Garrion as well. You would do best to hear me out; it will take no great time. Then you can decide upon your course of action."

"Speak then!" bugled Lord Dugald. "Say what you must and go!"

"I spoke the name Emphyrio. He lived two thousand years ago, and thwarted the puppet-masters of Damar. He awoke the Wirwans to their own sentience; he persuaded them to peace. Then he went to Damar, and spoke in the Cataademnon. Do you know of the Cataademnon?"

"No," said Lord Dugald contemptuously. "Speak on."

"The puppet-makers drove a spike through Emphyrio's head; then they contrived a new campaign. What they had not gained by violence, they hoped to take by craft. After the Empire Wars they repaired the city; they installed Overtrend and Underline; they established Boimarc. They also organized Thurible Trading Company and thereafter Boimarc sold to Thurible, and perhaps bought from Thurible as well. Puppet-makers indeed! What need had the Damarans of puppets? They used the folk of Fortinone for their puppets, and robbed us of our wealth."

Dugald rubbed his nose with his two forefingers. "How do you know all this?"

"How could it be otherwise? You called me a thief, a pirate. But you are the thief and pirate! More accurately, you are a puppet controlled by thieves."

Lord Dugald seemed to swell in his chair. "So now. So now you insult

me as well?"

"No insult: the literal truth. You are a puppet of a type created long ago in the Damaran glands."

Lord Dugald stared hard at Ghyl. "You are certain of this?"

"Of course. Lords? Ladies?" Ghyl gave a harsh laugh. "What a joke! You are excellent replicas of man—but you are puppets."

"Who infected you with such fantastic views!" demanded Lord Dugald in a stifled voice.

"No one. At Garwan I watched a Damaran walk; it walked with soft feet, as if its feet hurt. On Maastricht I remembered the lords and ladies walking just so. I remembered how they dreaded the light, the open sky; how they wished to run to the mountains to hide: like Wirwans, like Damarans. I remembered the color of their skin: the tone of pink that sometimes tends toward Damaran purple. On Maastricht I wondered how human-seeming folk could act so strangely. How as I so innocent? And so many generations of men and women: how could they have been so stupid, so unperceptive? Simple enough. A fraud so large cannot be comprehended: the idea is rejected."

As Ghyl spoke Dugald's face began to quiver and work in a most peculiar fashion, his mouth pulling in and out, his eyes bulging, the side of his head quivering and pulsing, so that Ghyl wondered whether he might be undergoing a seizure. Finally Dugald blurted: "Foolishness . . . Trash . . . Wicked nonsense . . ."

Ghyl shook his head. "No. Once the idea takes hold, everything is clear. Look!" He pointed to the hangings. "You stifle yourself in cloth like the Damarans; you have no music; you

cannot breed children with true men; you even have a strange odor."

Dugald sank slowly into his chair, and for a moment was silent. Then he glanced craftily sideways at Ghyl. "How far have you communicated these wild suppositions?"

"Widely enough," said Ghyl. "I would not care to come here otherwise."

"Hah! Who have you informed?"

"First, I sent a memorandum to the Historical Institute."

Dugald gave a sick groan. Then, with a pitiful attempt at bravado, he declared: "They will never heed such a farrago! Who else?"

"It would avail you nothing to kill me," said Ghyl politely. "I realize that you would like to do so. I assure you it would be useless. Worse than useless. My friends would spread the news, not only throughout Fortinone, but across the human universe: how the lords are but puppets, how their pride is play-acting, how they have cheated the folk who trusted them."

Dugald hunched down into his chair. "The pride is not counterfeit: it is true pride. Shall I tell you something? Only I, Grand Lord Dugald the Boimarc, of all the lords, have no pride. I am humble, I am purple with care—because only I know the truth. All the others—they are blameless. They realize their difference; they assume this to be the measure of their superiority. Only I am not proud; only I know who I am." He gave a piteous groan. "Well, I must pay your demands. What do you want? Wealth? A space-yacht? A town-house? All these?"

"I want only truth. Truth must be known."

Dugald gave a croak of protest. "What can I do! Would you have

me destroy my people? Honor is all we have: what else? I alone am without honor, and look at me! See how I fare! I am different from all the rest. I am a puppet!"

"You alone know?"

"I alone. Before I die I will instruct another and doom him as I long ago was doomed."

Into the alcove came Lord Parnasse. He looked with inquisitive eyes from Ghyl to Lord Dugald. "You are still at your business? We are almost ready to dine." He addressed Ghyl: "You will join us?"

Ghyl gave a strained laugh. Lord Parnasse lifted his eyebrows. "Certainly," said Ghyl. "I will be pleased to do so."

Lord Parnasse bowed curtly, and departed the alcove.

Lord Dugald contrived a face of bluff bonhomie. "Well then, let us consider the matter. You are not a Chaoticist; I'm sure you do not wish to destroy a time-tested socialty; after all—"

Ghyl held up his hand. "Lord Dugald, whatever else, the deception must be ended, and restitution must be made to the people you have cheated. If you and your 'socialty' can survive these steps, well and good. I bear malice only toward you and the Damarans, not the Lords of Ambroy."

"What you demand is impossible," declared Dugald. "You have come here swaggering and threatening, now my patience is exhausted! I warn you, with great fervor, to spread no falsehoods or incitements."

Ghyl turned toward the door. "The first folk to know shall be Lord Parnasse and his guests."

"No!" cried Dugald in anguish.

"Would you destroy us all?"

"The deception must be ended; there must be restitution."

Dugald held out his arms in despair and pathos. "You are obdurate?"

"'Obdurate'? I am passionate. You killed my father. You have robbed and cheated for two thousand years. You expect me to be otherwise?"

"I will mend matters. The rate will return to 1.18 percent. The underlings will receive an appreciably higher return; I will so demand. You cannot imagine how insistent are the Damarans!"

"The truth must be known."

"But what of our honor?"

"Depart Halma. Take your folk to a far planet, where none know your secret."

Dugald gave a cry of wild anguish. "How would I explain so drastic an act?"

"By the truth."

Dugald stared Ghyl eye to eye, and Ghyl, for a strange brief instant felt himself looking into unfathomable Damaran emptiness.

Dugald must also have found a quality to daunt him. He turned, strode from the alcove, out into the great hall, where he climbed up on a chair. His voice rasped through the murmur, the half-heard whispers. "Listen to me! Listen, everyone! The truth must be told."

The company swung around in polite surprise.

"The truth!" cried Dugald, "the truth must be told. Everyone must know at last."

There was silence in the hall. Dugald looked wildly right and left, struggling to bring forth words. "Two thousand years ago," he declared, "Emphyrio delivered Fortinone from those

Damaran monsters known as Wirwan.

"Now another Emphyrio has come, to expel another race of Damaran monsters. He has insisted upon truth. Now you will hear truth.

"Almost two thousand years ago, with Ambroy in ruins, a new set of puppets were sent from Damar. We are those puppets. We have served our masters the Damarans, and have paid to them money wrung from the toil of the underfolk. This is the truth; now that it is known the Damarans no longer can coerce us.

"We are not lords; we are puppets.

"We have no souls, no minds, no identities. We are synthetics.

"We are not men, not even Damarans. Most of all, we are not lords. We are whimsies, fancies, contrivances. Honor? Our honor is as real as a wisp of smoke. Dignity? Pride? Ridiculous even to use the words."

Dugald pointed to Ghyl. "He came here tonight calling himself Emphyrio, impelling me to truth.

"You have heard the truth.

"When the truth is finally told, there is no more to say."

Dugald stepped down from his chair.

The room was silent.

A chime sounded. Lord Parnasse stirred, looked around at his guests. "The banquet awaits us."

Slowly the guests filed from the room. Ghyl stood aside. Shanne passed near him. She halted. "You are Ghyl. Ghyl Tarvoke."

"Yes."

"Once, long ago you loved me."

"But you never loved me."

"Perhaps I did. Perhaps I loved you as much as I was able."

"It was long ago."

"Yes. Things are different now." Shanne smiled politely, and gathering

her skirts went her way.

Ghyl spoke to Lord Dugald. "Tomorrow you must speak to the undermen. Tell them the truth, as you have told the truth to your own folk. Perhaps they will not tear down your towers. If they are enraged beyond control, you must be prepared to depart."

"Where? To the Meagher Mountains to join the Wirwans?"

Ghyl shrugged. Lord Dugald turned, Lord Parnasse waited. They passed into the banquet hall leaving Ghyl standing alone.

He turned and went out on the terrace, and stood for a moment looking over the ancient city which spread with faint lights glowing to the Insse and beyond. Never had seen so beautiful a sight.

He went to the air-car. "Take me to the Brown Star Inn."

Chapter 24

The folk of Ambroy, so careful, so diligent, so frugal, were dazed for several hours after the announcement came over the Spay public announcement system. Work halted, folk went out into the streets, to look blankly into the sky toward Damar, up to the eyries on the Vashmont towers, then across town toward the Welfare Agency.

People spoke little to each other. Occasionally someone would give a short bark of harsh laughter, then become silent once more. Folk began to drift toward the Welfare Agency and by mid-day a great crowd stood in the surrounding plaza, staring at the grim old building.

Within was gathered the Cobol clan, holding an emergency meeting.

The crowd began to move restlessly. There were mutters, which swelling, became a vast susurus. Someone,

perhaps a Chaoticist, threw a stone, which broke a window. A face appeared in the gap, and an arm made admonitory motions, which seemed to irritate the crowd. Before there had been hesitancy and doubt as to the role of the Agency. But the angry gestures from the window seemed to put the Agency in the camp of those who had victimized the recipients; and, after all, had not the Welfare Agents enforced the regulations which made the swindle possible?

The crowd stirred; the mutter became an ugly growling sound. More rocks were thrown, more windows broken.

A loudspeaker on the roof suddenly brayed: "Recipients! Return to your work! The Welfare Agency is studying the situation, and in due course will make the proper representations. Everyone! Disperse, depart at once: to your homes or places of work. This is an official instruction."

The crowd paid no heed; more rocks and bricks were thrown; and suddenly the Agency had become a place in a state of siege.

A group of young men surged up to the locked portal, tried to force it open. Gun-fire sounded, several were laid low. The crowd pushed forward, entered the Agency through the broken windows. There was more gun-fire, but the crowd was within the building and many horrible deeds occurred. The Cobols were torn to bits, the structure put to the torch.

Hysteria continued throughout the night. The eyries remained undamaged mainly because the mob had no feasible mode of attack. On the next day the Guild Council attempted to restore order, with some success, and the Mayor set to work organizing a militia.

Six weeks later a hundred space-craft of every description—passenger

packets, cargo vessels, space-yachts—departed Ambroy and crossed to Damar. A few Damarans were killed, a few more captured. The rest took refuge in their residences.

A deputation of the captured Damaran were handed an ultimatum:

"For two thousand years you have plundered us without pity or regret. We demand total retribution. Bring forth all of your wealth: every thread of fabric, every precious artifact, all your treasure, in money, credits, foreign accounts and exchange, and all other property of value. These articles and this wealth will thereupon become ours. We will then destroy the residences with explosives. The Damarans must henceforth live on the surface in conditions as bleak as those you inflicted upon us. Thereafter you must pay to the State of Fortinone an indemnity of ten million vouchers each year, for two hundred Halma years.

"If you do not immediately agree to these terms you will be destroyed, and not one Damaran will remain alive."

Four hours later the first precious articles began to be conveyed from the residences.

In Undle Square a shrine was erected to shelter a crystal case containing the skeleton of Emphyrio. On the door of a nearby narrow-fronted house with amber glass windows hung a plaque of polished black obsidian. Silver characters read:

In this house lived and worked the son of Amiante Tarvoke, Ghyl, who, taking the name of Emphyrio for his own, did the name, his father and himself great credit.

—Jack Vance

THE END



Let's do it for love

BY ROBERT BLOCH

Joe Stevens, an inquisitive chemist, was not satisfied with partial success. His spot-remover took soup off your vest and also, the spots off a leopard. His hair-restorer sent billiard balls to the barber shop. But it seemed that no one wanted hairy billiard balls or spotless leopards. So, one day Joe said to himself: How nice it would be if everybody loved everybody else! No more war. No more hate. Joe went to work, bent upon spreading love throughout the world. And did the world appreciate it? Oh, brother!



SOMETIMES they come crawling out of the woodwork. Sometimes they wear Napolean hats and ride in on invisible white horses. Sometimes they're equipped complete with little green men who keep pulling your socks down when they're not looking.

But this one was different. He looked completely normal. I guessed his age at thirty, his weight at about 160, stripped. Only he wasn't stripped. He was wearing the kind of blue suit that this kind of guy always wears whenever he takes his wife along with him to pick out a gray one.

He had brown hair, rimless glasses, and one of those sincere faces you usually see painted on expensive Mamma dolls. Oh yes, he had a name, too — Joe Stevens. Nothing alarming about any of these things, nothing to make me think that he was a fugitive from the laughing academy.

But it was what he said that set me off higher than a rocket to the moon.

"Mr. Mortimer, you're a public relations man," he yacked.

"What kind of a job can you do to promote love?"

I opened my mouth, but for a minute nothing came out. And when nothing comes out of my mouth for a whole minute, I get worried. Finally I reached inside and dragged out a few words.

"Love?" I said. "You mean, boy-meets-girl kind of love?"

"Not exactly. Perhaps I'd better explain."

"Sit down," I suggested. He picked out a chair, which wasn't too difficult, seeing as how I only have one chair in my office. And then it started.

When it finished, about fifteen minutes later, I was in full possession of the following facts, any or all of which I would gladly have traded for a two-cent stamp.

Joseph Stevens, my visitor, was a chemist employed by the Wagtail Dog Biscuit Company, Inc., of this city. Married, and the father of two children, he was wont to slip down into the basement of his modest little mortgage-covered cottage during the evening and perform experiments.

At a time when all decent, respectable Godfrey-fearing citizens are usually huddled around their TV sets, Joe Stevens would be found somewhere behind the furnace, either working out or testing a chemical formula he had invented.

"I thought if I sort of puttered around long enough," he ex-

plained, in his erudite, scientific way, "I might hit on something that would make me some money. I'd be just as happy to do it for the fun of experimenting but Dorothy — that's my wife — seems to prefer money."

I nodded.

"You do understand," said Stevens. "I take it you're married, too?"

"Yes. I understand perfectly," I told him. "And that is one of the reasons I very definitely am *not* married."

"Oh. Well, anyway, I perfected quite a few compounds during the last few years of work. I rigged up a very complete little laboratory in the cellar, and managed to perfect a number of products. But none of them, so far, have appealed to any manufacturer."

"Just what did you come up with?"

"Well, for example, there was my spot remover. It looked to me like a sure-fire proposition."

"But there are plenty of spot removers on the market right now, aren't there?"

"Not like mine. This was no ordinary naphtha compound. My Spot Remover would actually remove any spot. I thought it might be kind of dramatic to hold a demonstration for some possible buyers, so I took a bottle of the stuff out to the Zoo and tossed some on a leopard. Sure enough, it worked."

"You took the spots right off a leopard?"

"Absolutely. But all that happened was the zoo officials wanted to sue me for damaging their property — because without spots their leopard looked like a common mountain lion. My buyers got scared, and Dorothy made me give up the idea. I haven't even tried to use that Spot Remover again, except the time I put some on my youngest child when she had the measles."

"Is that all you perfected?"

"No. The next thing was a headache powder. That really worked, too. But the trouble was, most people would rather have a headache than sprinkle this powder on their heads."

Right at this point I could have used a little of the stuff myself. But I determined to carry on to the bitter end. "What else did you invent?"

"Oh, plenty of things. Like my hair restorer. It actually would grow hair on a billiard ball. But then I found out that nobody wants to buy billiard balls with hair growing on them."

"Life is cruel," I told him. "But when do we get to the love part?"

"Only after about two years more of compounding and mixing and stirring and blending. But the important thing is, once I got the basic concept, I worked night and day, every weekend and holi-

day, to concoct this formula. And finally, I got it. This isn't a fluke — I tell you, it's going to revolutionize the world!"

"But what is it, exactly? What does it do?"

"It's simply a glandular stimulant which produces an endocrinological readjustment of the metabolic factors affecting personality mutation, thus increasing normal empathy."

"There's just one little point that bothers me."

"Namely?"

"What does it mean?"

"It means I have produced a chemical compound that makes people love one another. Simple, isn't it?"

"You are — I mean, it is," I gulped. "But aren't there already such chemicals in use? Regular aphrodisiacs?"

"That's just the point. My concoction is *not* an aphrodisiac. It does not stimulate sexual activity or arouse the senses."

"Too bad," I sighed. "I was kind of thinking of a big advertising and promotion campaign, maybe with a picture of some guy holding a violin and smooching some broad who's playing the piano — like a perfume, see?" And then we —"

"This is not a perfume, Mr. Mortimer. It can be taken orally, by injection, or direct cutaneous application."

"Watch your language, son."

"I mean, it can be applied to the surface of the skin and the pores will absorb it."

"Like a beauty cream?"

"No. It doesn't change the appearance. But it does alter behavior patterns. It eliminates hatred, prejudice, dislike, antipathy. People exposed to this potion feel nothing but pure affection for others — all others."

"Now, wait a minute! You mean to tell me you've invented something that will actually win friends and influence people? What about hangovers?"

"There is no hangover, as you call it, Mr. Mortimer. Depending on the amount administered and the method of absorption, the effects of this formula vary from a few hours' duration to lifetime permanency."

"You take enough, the right way, and you love everybody the rest of your life?"

"Exactly!"

"Even neighbors with loud radios, and guys who try to pass your car on the right, and income tax collectors?"

"Certainly."

"This I've got to be convinced of."

For a moment I stared at the floor, trying to find the two pieces of the infinitive I'd just split. Also, to be perfectly frank, I was also looking for a way to get rid of Mr. Stevens. A good, fast way,

because I had done business with screwballs before and found it wise to get rid of them before they started to bounce.

"I'm willing to convince you," Mr. Stevens was saying, "if you agree to take me on as your client."

This was all the opening I needed. "Well, as a matter of fact, I've got a pretty tight schedule — loaded with assignments, you might say. Besides, I expect I'll have to be going down to Washington next week for one of the big oil companies, and —"

Joe Stevens rose and stuck out his hand. "I guess I shouldn't have bothered you, Mr. Mortimer. A big man like you, I know how it is — you wouldn't be interested in someone like me with only a measly three hundred dollar retainer —"

I grabbed his hand and held on, tight. Very, very tight. "Now, wait a minute! I was just about to say, money isn't everything, you know. Even though I'm running a business, I still have time for sentiment. And your notion of spreading love appeals to my idealistic side. Definitely! Er — do you happen to have the three hundred bucks with you?"

"Here it is."

With his free hand he drew a roll of small bills out of his pocket. With my free hand I managed to count and tuck the money away in my vest. And all the while I

was giving him the old fraternity grip and the old college try.

"I see great possibilities in your love serum, Stevens," I told him. "Should have no trouble at all selling it to the right parties. This isn't a matter of shoving propaganda at the public — what you want is to interest a few people with money and get this thing rolling. But first, I'd still feel better if I had a little demonstration."

"Whenever you like," he agreed. "Just come out to the house. If you weren't so busy and all, I'd have invited you to come home right now, for supper."

I grinned. "Like I say, Stevens, I'm a man of sentiment. Let's go."

Half an hour later I was standing on the doorstep of the Stevens bungalow and Stevens was doing the honors.

"Dorothy," he said, "I have a guest for dinner."

"So I see. Why didn't you call and let me know ahead of time?"

"Well, it was all so sudden. I mean, Mr. Mortimer here just got together with me and —"

"Together where? In some bar?"

"Now you know I don't drink, honey. This is business."

Dorothy Stevens sniffed. She wasn't a bad-looking tomato for a housewife-type, but that sniff told me all I wanted to know about Joe Stevens and his home-life. "What kind of business?" she

asked, as the two kids ran out and grabbed Joe by the legs.

"You know, darling. The love potion. Mr. Mortimer is in public relations and he's going to promote it for me. He thinks there's a lot of possibility in it."

"Huh!" Tomatoes can be awfully sour.

"Now, sweetheart — we can tell you all about it at dinner."

"I suppose." She stood back and let us get past her into the living room. Joe Stevens dragged his kids along — they had their hands in his pockets and I kind of got the idea they had learned this particular tricks from watching Mama at work.

Dorothy Stevens went out into the kitchen as we sat down at the table and began to rattle pots and pans — which is a woman's way of swearing.

"Say," she called, "what did you do about the car?"

"What?" A look came over Stevens' face and I glanced around to see if I was on a rocking boat — because he certainly seemed to be seasick all of a sudden.

"You know perfectly well what," Dorothy called out. "I gave you three hundred dollars just before you left the house for the down-payment — all the money we got from Aunt Imogene's will. What did the man say? Will he take it on a trade-in?"

"I didn't get to the car-dealer."

"You didn't?" The rattling of

pots turned into a banging and crashing. "Then hand back the money — it isn't safe to carry so much around with you in cash."

"I — uh — haven't got the money."

The banging stopped. "You haven't? Then who has?"

"Well, Mr. Mortimer here needed a retainer if he's going to work on the formula, and so —"

There was a loud crash.

Joe Stevens rushed out into the kitchen and closed the door. I sat there and tried not to listen. The two kids were watching a cowboy kill fifty Indians on television, and the noise almost but not quite drowned out the sounds of murder from the kitchen.

Finally it was all over and Stevens tottered back into the room. He didn't look seasick any more. He looked drowned.

"Dorothy has a headache," he said. "We'll be eating alone, I guess. If you don't mind."

So we went into the kitchen and ate alone. The kids did all the talking during the meal, and most of the eating. But after we finished, I managed to drag Stevens back to business.

"Don't be discouraged," I told him. "Women just don't understand these things. But once we get rolling, and the money starts coming in, she'll be all right."

He cheered up, a little. "Thanks for being so patient with me," he

said. "You know, Dorothy is really a fine wife — I couldn't ask for better. It's just that she hasn't got the faith I have in my inventions. Now, this compound —"

"Yes, let's see it," I told him. "You say you work in the cellar?"

He took me down there, and I got to admit he'd rigged up the best little laboratory I ever saw outside of a Universal Pictures horror movie. He had electric gadgets and test-tubes and coils and retorts; everything except Boris Karloff in a white robe and an old pair of rubber gloves. And he had a nice, pint-sized vial of bubbling yellow stuff that sparkled when he held it up to the light.

"Here it is — the compound."

I squinted at it. "Very pretty. Haven't seen anything like it since I served a hitch in the Army Medical Corps. But I got only one question — does it work?"

"Does it work? Of course it works. Take my word for it. I've tried it out. Here, you drink some and see for yourself."

"Not me, brother. I'm in public relations, how can I love people? But I insist on a demonstration."

There was a squawk from outside the cellar door.

"What's that?" yelled Stevens, jumping about a foot and almost spilling the liquid out of the vial.

"Oh, just some alley cat, I suppose."

"Alley cat?" A gleam came

into his eye; one of those genuine 18-karat Mad Scientist gleams. "Wait here."

He tiptoed to the door. There was a shriek and a scuffle and a snarl, and he came back with the cat in his arms. "Help me hold it now while I fill this hypodermic syringe," he panted. "There. Just a drop will do. Don't let it claw you! My, it's a fierce beast, isn't it? Now — let me make the injection here in the shoulder."

The cat jumped about a foot and landed on the table, back hunched and claws ready for action. It spit and snarled and — smiled. And then its tail began to wave. It purred. It came over and rubbed against my shoulders.

"See? Just one drop."

I shrugged.

"Want more proof? Wait a minute." He raced up the stairs and in a minute he was back with a cage in one hand. Something tiny and yellow fluttered and squeaked inside the cage, and when it saw the cat, it beat against the bars. He reached in with the hypodermic needle, and the canary quieted. It began to sing.

Then he set the cage down on the laboratory table and opened the door. The cat went over to the cage. The canary came out. The cat opened its mouth. It raised its paws. Then it purred and stroked the canary. The canary jumped up and perched on its head, chirp-

ing. The mewing and the chirping blended until they were doing a duet that sounded very much like half of a barbershop quartet singing *I Love You Truly*.

I stared, but there it was, right in front of my own eyes. One drop for each and they made beautiful mew-sic together.

"You win," I said. "I'm sold. And you mean to say this will work on anything? Animal or human?"

"Of course. It's all a glandular reaction, as I told you. The basic components —"

"Yeah. I know. And it's permanent, doesn't wear off?"

He frowned. "I can't answer that one fully, yet. I haven't had enough opportunity to experiment. Injections are all I've tried, and they seem permanent enough. It seems to me that spraying the entire skin surface would be even more of a guarantee of a permanent reaction. The oral method is another way of absorbing the compound. This I haven't been able to work with."

"Well, I hope you won't get me wrong," I said. "But it might be a good idea to test that idea right here at home. I mean, slipping a drink of this stuff to your wife —"

His frown got frownier. "I know what you mean," he sighed. "And I'd thought of it, even suggested it. But Dorothy won't cooperate. And she won't let me use it on the kids."

"You could sort of sneak it into her coffee or something, couldn't you?" I suggested. "No worse than a bad Mickey Finn."

"No, Mr. Mortimer, that's out. It isn't ethical. It violates the true spirit of Science."

I shrugged. "Okay, just a thought. And speaking of thoughts, now that I've seen it in action, what you want me to do with this stuff? I can promote it, but what's the gimmick? You must have some idea in mind."

"I have a purpose. A very serious purpose," he assured me.

"Making money is always serious," I agreed. "And I'm here to help. Is your idea to get this made up like some kind of a perfume and use it in an atomizer? So that a tomato can get the old love-light working in her boy friends' eyes? Or do you want it for salesmen only—slip it into customers' drinks so they'll love that product, huh? Or is it for political campaigns? Blow it out through the air-conditioning system in a meeting hall and have all the voters fall in a swoon for the candidate?"

"You can stop right there, Mr. Mortimer."

"Okay. But I got a million more ideas. When I go into action for a client, I really go into action."

"You have the wrong slant entirely. This discovery of mine will never be used commercially.

While there may be money in it for me eventually, I do not intend to prostitute it commercially. This is a serious and important finding. I told you it could revolutionize the world, and that is what I plan it to do."

"Like how, for instance?"

"Mr. Mortimer, I need your help in only one thing; to enlist the attention of important people all over the nation. We must tell them about this discovery and promote its use. It is my hope that the government itself will take over the manufacture of my preparation and prepare bombs."

"Bombs?"

"Yes. Love-bombs, you might call them. A complete stockpile of bombs which can be dropped on foreign soil, exploded in quantities large enough to cover the face of the earth, and spread love throughout the entire world.

"Do you understand now what this means? It can be the end of wars, the end of hatred, the end of suspicion and enmity and fear. Men will love one another and my work will be done."

I blinked. "But won't it cost a fortune? What about the machinery to produce them? How about time?"

"It won't cost a fraction of what it costs us currently to maintain armaments," Stevens declared. "Regular detonating mechanisms can be used, filled with this concoction in fluid or

gas form, and they could be turned out in quantity within a period of two or three weeks. No, the whole thing is simple. All I need now is your advice and help in bringing this whole miraculous discovery to the attention of those in authority. And I hope you'll agree with me that it's a job worth doing."

He didn't look like a Mad Scientist any more. He looked like the starry-eyed idealist.

I thought about it for a minute. The whole notion was screwy, but it might work. Anyhow, the chemical *did* work. And it had great possibilities. Suppose the government would go for it? An exclusive contract to supply them with this elixir of love might run into a pretty penny or a beautiful buck. Stranger things have happened. Great nuts from little acorns grow, and when some dumb old Greek name of Archimedes or something invented the lever, little did he reck that some day from this simple discovery would spring the entire mighty slot-machine industry.

"I'll do it!" I said. "Meet me tomorrow morning, nine o'clock, in Bert Bugle's office."

"Bert Bugle?"

"The attorney," I explained. "First thing we gotta do is get this mixture patented. Protect it against anyone else stealing the formula. He knows his way around in Washington and he can steer

us to the right guys to see. Cut through all this red tape, take us through to the President, maybe."

"Fine. I knew I could rely on you, Mr. Mortimer."

"See you at nine, then? Good-night."

"Goodnight," said Stevens. The cat and the canary gave me a farewell serenade, and as I went out the door I could see the canary pecking at the cat's claws. The canary wasn't hurting the animal; just giving it a manicure.

Came nine o'clock. Came Stevens and I to Bert Bugle's office in the Banker's Building.

I went in ahead of Stevens and paved the way.

"Hi, Bert. How's life from the back of an ambulance? Have you habeased any good corpuses lately?"

"Mortimer! I've been looking for you! What are you doing about Mountain Dew? Six months ago I gave you a thousand-dollar retainer to promote it for me, and where are we? Halfway to bankruptcy, that's where!"

"But Bert —"

"I've got a lot of money tied up in that company. Everybody in Blue View is laughing at me because we can't sell the lousy stuff. I'll admit it's a vile-tasting bottled water, but you assured me you could put it on every table in the suburb for your fee. I've got a good mind to slap a lawsuit on you!"

"Bert! Listen a minute, will you? Never mind about the Mountain Dew. I've got something big for you in the outer office. Something really *big!*"

"Animal, vegetable, elephant?"

"This is real, this is *really* real. Come on out and meet a million dollars!"

At the mention of a million dollars, Bert Bugle calmed down. I led him out to meet Joe Stevens and commenced talking.

The whole pitch went just the way I'd planned. I told him what I had, what we wanted. Then I pulled the trump card. I sent Joe out for an alley-cat and told him to buy a canary in the pet shop downstairs. In five minutes he was back with a mangy, spitting tomcat and an anemic-looking canary. Out came the vial and the hypodermic syringe. In went the compound. And thus did Love come to Bert Bugle's office.

"There," I said. "Now do you understand?"

Bugle's eyes goggled. "Do I? Indeed I do! Mortimer, I want to talk to you for a moment, privately. If you'll excuse us, Mr. Stevens."

Bugle dragged me into his private office and slammed the door. Then he grabbed my collar. "Man," he panted. "Do you know what this means?"

"It means you're tearing my collar," I informed him.

"Never mind that. This love

philtre, or whatever it is, works!"

"Of course it works, and it's going to be worth millions."

"Millions to Stevens, perhaps. But for me, it's plain bankruptcy."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well, suppose his scheme goes through — and it might, very easily. They start dropping love-bombs all over the place and what happens? People begin loving each other, that's what!"

"Is that bad?"

"It's awful!" Bugle groaned. "Eight years I went to school, ten years I spent building up a law practise. And now people are going to love each other. No more lawsuits! No more divorces! No more thefts, no more murders, and that means no more need for lawyers! Yes, and no need for judges, or sheriffs, or police. What kind of a deal is this, that I should cut my own throat?"

"But you'll be assured of a good fee for handling our work."

"Maybe so." Bugle stuck out his chin. "But after all, I owe something to the legal profession. I have ethics to maintain, and because I'm ethical, I can't stand by and see a man deliberately and coldbloodedly set out to exterminate rape, arson, fraud, and all the things we attorneys hold so dear. No, I'm afraid I not only refuse — I must also go ahead and fight your scheme with every force at my command."

He turned to go back into the

other room where Joe waited.

"Just a minute, Bert. This guy Stevens is sincere, he's sacrificing everything for an ideal. Maybe you won't help us, but you can't fight us. It isn't fair!"

"Sorry. But I have no choice. And as for you, if you'd spent your time promoting Mountain Dew instead of running around with crackpots, I might have listened to you."

"All right," I sighed. "You win. But please, don't *tell* Stevens you're going to fight him. Just say you have too much other work or something."

"You talk like a crackpot yourself," Bugle sneered, "but that's your affair. Go on out and tell him I'm too busy to handle the deal. But I warn you, I'm going to get up a legal committee to pull strings in Washington against this. And as for you, I'm suing you for that thousand dollar retainer on Mountain Dew. Now, good day to you."

If that was Bert Bugle's contribution to a good day, I'd hate to see what he'd come up with for a bad one. I shuffled out, collected Stevens, the cat and the canary. In the car I told him a sob story about Bugle's health breaking down.

"But don't worry, we'll get somebody else. The world is full of lawyers."

"We'd better hurry. I haven't much time, and my money is

running out. Lawyers cost a lot."

"But you've got a steady job."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I quit yesterday. Figured this would be taking all our time from now on. Dorothy is plenty burned up about it, so it's up to you."

"Great!" I managed to keep the car on the road, but I was beginning to sweat a little. So far, in one day on the assignment I'd accomplished a lot. I'd made a man quit his job, set things up for his wife to leave him, and lined myself up for a lawsuit.

"You know, I have a lot of confidence in you, Mr. Mortimer. You sure know how to get things done." Stevens gave me that trusting look and I winced. "Now where are we going?"

"Where —? Why, to the newspaper, of course."

"Newspaper?"

"We need publicity, don't we? What's a better way of getting Washington to notice an important discovery? Why, this is front page news here — world-wide news." As I talked, I began to see the sense of that. Why hadn't I thought of it in the first place? Once we got our headlines, lawyers would come running to represent us. It was that simple.

"Here," I said. "You wait in the car. I'm going up and see the editor. Not the city editor — the managing editor, the big boy himself. Give me that vial, and the cat, and the canary."

I marched in. I knew my way around, and within five minutes I was sitting in Tom Mason's office. The vial was in my hand, the cat was on my lap, and the canary was sitting on my left ear.

"Now listen, Mortimer, if this is another one of your crazy stunts." Mason began to make noises like an executive. I cut him short and launched into my story. Thirty seconds of it was enough to quiet him down, and a minute had him gasping.

The cat meowed, the canary chirped, I talked, and Mason gurgled. Finally his gurglings turned into words.

"And it really works?" he choked. "You can drop love-bombs on the whole world, even Russia?"

"I personally guarantee it."

"It's a miracle!" wheezed Mason.

"Then you'll give it a front-page spread? I've got the guy downstairs in my car right now, ready for pictures. You can play up the local boy angle, get it on the wire services!"

"I'd sooner run my own obituary!"

"What?"

"Get out of here before I throw you out!"

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you. And that's just why I won't touch the

story with a ten-foot pole. Can't you see what would happen if they did drop love-bombs? War would stop, wouldn't it? And crime, too. There wouldn't be any stories for newspapers to run any more, and I'd be out of business in a year."

"But couldn't you run stories about *nice* things? About the good, constructive actions people would be engaged in? Isn't that news, too?"

"My boy, always remember one thing. Good news is no news. No, I'll have no part of it. And don't try any of your publicity stunts because they won't work. I'll give orders to kill any story mentioning love-bombs. And that's final."

His secretary stuck her beak through the door, thus completing her resemblance to Woody Woodpecker, and sniffed. "Mr. Mason, there's a Mr. Bugle on the phone for you."

"Bert Bugle?" I asked.

"Neighbor of mine out in Blue View. Wonder what he wants." Mason moved towards the phone and waved me out. "Get out of here, Mortimer, but remember what I said. No story. Not now, or ever!"

I got out. Down and out. No story, and already Bugle and Mason would be getting together. They had to be neighbors, yet! How could I lick this thing? Every step took me closer to the

edge of ruin. Nobody wanted love, so go fight City Hall. Tell it to your Congressman.

"Knocklewort!" I shouted.

Joe Stevens blinked at me as I opened the car door.

"Knocklewort! That's our answer! We're going to see Congressman Knocklewort!"

"But what about the papers?"

"Oh, that." I gulped. "The editor was afraid to break the yarn without an official OK. Security measures, you know; talk about dropping bombs and stuff might upset people. Have to clear it with the government. Knocklewort's our man. He's Congressman for this district, he's in town this week, and besides, I once handled his campaign for him. We'll tell him the story and let him take it right to Washington."

We were off to the Hotel Tippomore, vial, cat and canary. And when I got through to Gifford Knocklewort's suite, I took the whole menagerie upstairs with me, including Joe Stevens.

Once again I went into the now familiar pitch. I told old Knocklewort the whole story, watching his face through a cloud of cigar smoke. One thing about Knocklewort — even though he is a Congressman, he very seldom blows out anything but smoke. He kept his mouth shut until I'd finished, and I waited very anxiously for a reaction. Finally, it came.

"Sorry, I'd like to help you, but it's out."

"Think of the publicity, Congressman! You, as sponsor of this idea, taking it to the President. Why, you'll be hailed as the saviour of the world! This thing is big! I'll bet you could be the next President yourself, with this deal."

"President of what?" asked Knocklewort. "A bankrupt nation?"

"But it wouldn't cost much to make these bombs," Joe Stevens explained. "I have the formula all worked out, ready to go."

"Isn't that just lovely?" Knocklewort spread his palms upward. "Now work out another formula showing how people can get along in this country after you drop your bombs. Your cat here, and your canary can get along — they've got others to feed them. But people can live only by working. Working means business. Business means competition. Competition means progress. Progress won't exist once folks start to love each other. They won't want to step on each other's toes, take advantage of one another."

"Why, in six months business would be at a standstill and this nation would be ruined. For that matter, if folks start to live in harmony, they won't need any government — and I'll be out of a job!"

I couldn't stand to look at

Stevens' face, so I sat down. The young chemist was getting a new formula into his head — a formula of what makes the world go around.

"Sorry, young man." Knocklewort put his arm around Joe Stevens' shoulders. "I'm as much in favor of love as the next man — kiss a lot of babies when I campaign — but there just isn't any place for it in business, or politics either. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a dinner engagement to keep. Old friend of yours, Mortimer. Tom Mason. Know him well, don't you?"

"Yes," I sighed. "I know him. Well, come on, Joe. Let's go."

We went. Stevens was scowling, and even the cat and the canary seemed to have lost their sex appeal for each other. But in the car, Stevens turned to me with every tooth gritted.

"I'm not licked yet," he said. "Can you leave for Washington with me next week?"

"Why, you don't want to do that, my boy. First of all, it costs too much money."

"Never mind. Dorothy's going to leave me. Oh, don't think I haven't realized that! She'll leave the minute she hears we aren't getting anywhere. So I might as well sell the house. And I'll take the money to finance us. We'll go to Washington and see the President himself!"

"Now look, son." I faced Joe Stevens and for a moment it was as if I actually were facing a son of mine. "You might as well know the truth. Bert Bugle isn't sick. He just won't touch your problem because he thinks love will ruin the legal profession. And Tom Mason isn't afraid of censorship. He believes love will kill newspaper circulation. You heard what the Congressman told you. And you're going to get the same story everywhere. It will be the same in Washington.

"So you had better realize one thing right now. This world doesn't want love. It isn't ready for love yet on a large scale. Oh, it might work for individuals. It always has, you know. And it might even work for a small community. But not for the masses."

"I can't believe it," Stevens sighed.

"You'd better believe it. Because you're going to be fought tooth and nail. As I left Mason's office, Bert Bugle was already calling him on the phone to warn him about your love-bomb menace. And now, the Congressman is dining with Mason. They're probably all going to get together and run you out of town. I advise you to forget this scheme, go back to Dorothy, take your old job. And — much as it hurts me to do this — here's your three hundred bucks back."

Stevens managed to find a smile

and spread it over his face. It didn't quite reach. "Never mind the money," he said. "You stuck by me, and you tried your best to help."

"Please take it. I don't want your dough."

He shook his head and I was surprised that nothing rattled. "No, it's yours. I'm going home now and see what Dorothy is going to do." Stevens made a gesture that included the cat, the canary, and the vial of love potion. "You might as well keep these as souvenirs. I won't be needing them."

I nodded, then plodded up the street. The cat followed me, purring, with the canary hitching a free ride on his back. I held the vial in my hand and looked for a sewer. No sense keeping this stuff. It was just bad medicine. Nobody wanted love. Bert Bugle was right. I should have stuck to Mountain Dew Water.

Then the thought sneaked up and kicked me in the pants. I stopped plodding and started running.

I didn't stop running until around ten o'clock that night, when I ended up panting on Joe Stevens' doorstep.

He opened the door and I breezed in.

"Mortimer. What brings you here?"

"A taxi. But never mind that. I came to tell you that we're saved."

"Saved?"

"Just came from Mason's house. He and Congressman Knocklewort and Bert Bugle have agreed to call off their feud. Bert Bugle isn't going to sue me either. We can have all the publicity we want, Bugle will get us our patent protection, and Knocklewort himself will go to Washington for us to see the President!"

"Wait a minute. How did all this happen?"

"You did it! Or, rather, your love potion did it. Remember the vial you left with me?"

Stevens nodded.

"Well, I got to thinking. All three of these birds were having dinner together. If a delivery man showed up at the back door with some Mountain Dew Table Water. And if they drank it at dinner — and if this water happened to contain the love potion."

"You did it!"

It was my turn to nod. "Then, when I figured the stuff had plenty of time to get in its licks, I showed up at the front door. The rest was easy as pie. They loved me. They loved you. They loved the idea. They loved everybody. So we're all set. Now we can begin our campaign." I paused, waiting for the applause. "What's the matter, Joe? Doesn't it get you excited?"

Stevens stared out of the window. "You forget what I told you," he said. "If my potion is

injected, the effect is permanent. If it's sprayed on to the skin surface it's also sure to last forever. But if you just drink a small amount, it wears off, perhaps in a matter of a few hours. Tomorrow those men will be free of its influence and they'll go back to opposing us."

"But we can keep them hopped up with the water forever if needs be," I argued. "I can manage to slip them drinks all day long."

"It's no use. They're not the only ones who have to be sold. No, Mortimer, you've shown me today that you can't sell love to the world. Everybody in Washington will be the same way and you can't change human nature."

"Guess I never thought of that angle," I glanced at him closely. "But that isn't all you have on your mind, is it?"

Stevens pointed towards the door. "See those suitcases? Dorothy packed up when she heard the news. She's ready to leave now. Don't know what's keeping her."

"That's tough," I said. "If there's anything I can do to help—" I stopped and sniffed. "You smell anything burning?"

"You're right, there is something burning!" Stevens wheeled around. "It's the cellar! The house is on fire. Come on!"

We clattered down the basement steps and into the smoky

cellar. But the house wasn't on fire. I saw only two things burning down there. Stevens' wife, Dorothy, and a little pile of papers on the laboratory table.

Since Dorothy seemed to be burning only with rage, I turned my attention to the pile of papers. "Get some water!" I yelled. Stevens ran to the laundry tub, filled a pail, and splashed the contents over the charred fragments on the table.

"What's the big idea?" he asked. Dorothy made a little sound that might have been a laugh and might also have been a sob.

"It's too late," she said. "I did it."

"Did what—?" Stevens stopped and stared.

"I burned the formula. The formula for the love potion."

"But—"

"Love potion!" She was sobbing, now. "All it ever caused was trouble. And even though I'm leaving, — yes, I *am* leaving and for good, so don't try to talk me out of it — I wanted to get rid of that horrible elixir forever!"

Stevens sat down and covered his face. "Two years of work shot to pieces!" he groaned. "Nothing to show for it but the little flask on the table."

Dorothy was over to the table and back again before I'd noticed it. She thrust the flask into my hands. "Here, Mr. Mortimer!

A little farewell gift for you. A token of my personal appreciation for busting up my family, busting up my husband's life. Now, get out of here! Get out of here and take this damned love with you!"

I held the flask and stared at the yellowish liquid. I held love in my hands and it was cold and pale. I didn't like it, because nobody loves love. It doesn't work for the masses, only for individuals.

"Here," I said to Dorothy. "A little farewell gift for you, too!"

Lifting the flask, I broke it over the top of her head. She went down in a heap, with the love potion splashing all over her.

"You \$%&@¢/!!!" yelled Stevens — only, he yelled it much more plainly than that. "Trying to kill my wife, huh? Just let me get my hands on you —"

The proposition didn't appeal to me. I turned and ran. The last I ever saw of Joe Stevens, he was sitting on the cellar floor holding his wife in his arms, trying to revive her.

Yes, that was the last I ever saw of Stevens. But I heard from him once, since then.

About a week afterwards, he called me on the phone.

"I'm the happiest man in the world," he told me. "And I can never thank you enough for all you did for me."

"It was nothing, really."

"First of all, you showed me

that this business of reforming the world is a lot of foolishness. No one man or one idea is big enough to do the trick. So I went around and got my old job back again. From now on, I'm sticking to Dog Biscuits."

"And your wife?" I asked.

"Ever since you hit Dorothy on the head she's been a new woman. She adores me. And you deserve the thanks for it."

I smiled to myself. "Sort of thought that would do the trick," I said. "Couldn't figure out a better use for the last of the love potion than to spray her with it. You said it would be permanent."

"I guess it is." Stevens hesitated. "Just one thing you should know, though — only don't ever let my wife hear about it."

"What's that?"

"She made a mistake. There really was none of the love potion left at all."

"But the stuff I splashed on her from the flask —"

The happiest man in the world chuckled. "That was some cleaning fluid I had lying around."

He hung up, and I suppose that's the way the story ends. But there really was a love potion, and I can prove it. Come around to my office anytime and take a look at my cat and my canary.

Or, if you'd prefer to wait about a month or so, I think I'll be able to show you the only kittens in the world with wings.

TO FIT THE CRIME

BY RICHARD MATHESON

Do you suffer from cliché-itis? Does "Hot enough for you?" chill your blood? When your neighbor tells you "That's the way it goes!" do you ache to tear him loose from his tired tongue?

In that case you'll feel a real pang of sympathy for old Iverson Lord, who died from a combination of hardening of the arteries and semantic seizures. Not because of his death; for death comes to us all. It is what lay beyond the grave for ancient Iverson that will move you to tears. For the fires of Hell are reserved for those who are most allergic to heat; and the Devil gives unto sinners tortures attuned to the most exacting taste.

I'VE BEEN murdered!" cried ancient Iverson Lord.
"Brutally, foully murdered!"

"There, there," said his wife.

"Now, now," said his doctor.

"Garbage," murmured his son.

"As soon expect sympathy from mushrooms!" snarled the decaying poet. "From cabbages!"

"From kings," said his son.

The parchment face flinted momentarily, then sagged into meditative creases. "Aye, they will miss me," he sighed. "The kings of language, the emperors of the tongue, they shall know when I have passed."

The moulding scholar lay propped on a cloudbank of pillows. A peak of silken dressing gown erupted his turkey throat and head. His head was large, an eroded football with lace holes for eyes and a snapping gash of a mouth.



Illustrator: David Stoe

He looked at them: at his wife, his daughter, his son, and his doctor. His beady suspicious eyes played about the room. He glared at the walls. "Assassins," he grumbled as the doctor estimated pulse beat from a scrawny wrist.

Iverson Lord was near ninety. His limbs were glasslike and brittle. His blood ran slow. His heartbeat was a largo drum. Only his brain hung clear and unaffected, a last soldier defending the fort against senility.

"I refuse to die," he announced, as if someone had suggested it. His face darkened. "I will not let bleak nature dim my light nor strip the jewel of being from my fingers!"

"There, there," said his wife.

"There, there! There, there!" rasped the poet, false teeth clicking in an outrage. "What betrayal is this! That I, who shape my words and breathe into their forms the breath of might, should be fettered to this cliché-ridden imbecile!"

Mrs. Lord submitted her delicate presence to the abuse of her husband. She strained out a peace-making smile which played upon her faded features. She plucked feebly at mouse-grey curls.

"You're upset, Ivie dear," she said.

"Upset!" he cried. "Who would not be when set upon by gloating jackals!"

"Father," his daughter implored.

"Jackals, whose brains like sterile lumps beneath their skulls refuse to emanate the vaguest glow of insight into words." He narrowed his eyes and gave his life-long lecture once again. "Who cannot deal with word cannot deal with thought," he said. "Who cannot deal with thought should be dealt with *mercilessly!*" He pounded a strengthless fist on the counterpane.

"You'd better save your strength," his son suggested.

The jade eyes stabbed up, demolishing. Iverson Lord curled thin lips in revulsion. "Bug."

His son looked down on him. "Compose your affairs, Father," he said. "Accept. You'll find death not half bad."

"I am not dying!" howled the old poet. "You'd murder me, wouldn't you! Thug!" The ancient lips puffed out in newborn fury. "Murdered! Foully murdered!"

"Ivie dear, no one has murdered you," said his wife. "We've tried to be good to you."

"Good!" He grew apoplectic. "Mute good. Groveling good. *Insignificant* good. Ah! That I should have created the barren flesh about this bed of pain."

"Father, don't," begged his daughter.

Iverson Lord looked upon her. A look of stage indulgence flickered on his face. "So, Eunice, my bespectacled owl," he said, "I

suppose you are as eager as the rest to view your sire in the act of perishing."

"Father, don't talk that way," begged the myopic Eunice.

"What way, my tooth-ridden gobbler—my erupted Venus? In literate English? Yes, perhaps that does put rather a strain on your embalmed faculties."

Eunice blinked. She accepted.

"What will you do, child," inquired Iverson Lord, "when I am taken from you? Who will speak to you? Indeed, who will even look?" The old eyes glittered a *coup de grâce*. "Let there be no equivocation, my dear," he said gently. "You are ugly in the extreme."

"Ivie dear," pleaded Mrs. Lord.

"Leave her alone!" said Alfred Lord. "Must you destroy everything before you leave?"

Iverson Lord raised a hackle. "You," he intoned, darting a fanged glance. "Mental vandal. Desecrator of the mind. Defacing your birthright in the name of business. Pouring your honored blood into the sewers of commerciality."

His stale breath fluttered harshly. "Groveler before checkbooks. Scraper before bank accounts."

His voice strained into grating falsetto. "No, madame. Assuredly, madame. I kiss your fat, unwholesome mind, madame!"

Alfred Lord smiled now, content to let the barrages of his father fall upon himself. "Let me remind

you," he said, "of the importance of the profit system."

"Profit system!" exploded his sire. "Jungle system!"

"Supply and demand," said Alfred Lord.

"Alfred, don't," Eunice cautioned.

Too late to prevent venous eyeballs from threatening to discharge from their sockets. "Judas of the brain!" screamed the poet. "Boy scout of intellect! *Aaah!*"

"I pain to mention it," Alfred Lord still dropped coals, "but even a businessman may, tentatively, accept Christianity."

"Christianity!" snapped the jaded near-corpse, losing aim in his fury. "Outmoded bag of long-suffering beans! Better the lions had eaten all of them and saved the world from a bad bargain!"

"That will do, Iverson," said the doctor. "Calm yourself."

"You're upset, Ivie," said his wife. "Alfred, you mustn't upset your father."

Iverson Lord's dulling eyes flicked up final lashes of scorn at his fifty-year whipping post. "My wife's capacity for intelligible discourse," he said, "is about that of primordial gelatine. Her crowning virtue is stupidity."

He patted her bowed head with a smile. "My dear," he said, "you are nothing. You are absolutely nothing."

Mrs. Lord pressed white fingers

to her cheek. "You're upset, Ivie," her frail voice spoke. "You don't mean it."

The old man sagged back, dejected. "This is my penitence," he said. "To live with this woman who knows so little of words she cannot tell insult from praise."

The doctor beckoned to the poet's family. They moved from the bed toward the fireplace.

"That's right," moaned the rotting scholar. "Desert me. Leave me to the rats. I am to perish sans pity, sans hope, sans all. This is my legacy! To all semantic drudges: irreverence, intolerance, and a generation of unbridled dismay!"

The three survivors stood before the crackling flames.

"He's disappointed," said the son. "He expected to live forever."

"He *will* live forever," Eunice emoted. "He is a great man."

"He's a little man," said Alfred Lord, "who is trying to get even with nature for reducing his excellence to usual dust."

"Alfred," admonished his mother, "your father is old. And . . . he's afraid."

"Afraid? Perhaps. Great? No. Every spoken cruelty, every deception and selfishness has reduced his greatness. Right now he's an old, dying crank."

Then they heard Iverson Lord. "Sweep her away!" howled the sinking poet. "Whip her away with ninetails of eternal life!"

The doctor was trying to cap-

ture the wildly flailing wrist.

"Arrest her!" yelled Iverson Lord. "Let her not embrace me as her lover! Avaunt—black, foul-faced strumpet!"

His breath escaped like faltering steam as the old man collapsed back on his pillow. His lips formed soundless, never-to-be-known quatrains. His gaze fused to the ceiling. His hands twitched out a last palsied gesture of defiance. Then he stared at the ceiling until the doctor reached adjusting fingers.

The doctor said, "It's over."

Mrs. Lord gasped. "No," she wept. She could not believe.

Eunice did not weep. "He is with the angels now," she said.

"Let justice be done," said the son of dead Iverson Lord.

It was a grey place.

No flames. No licking smoke. No pallor of doom obscured his sight. Only grey—mediocre grey—unrelieved grey.

Iverson Lord strode through the grey place.

"The absence of retributive heat and leak-eyed, wailing souls is preeminently encouraging," he said to himself.

Striding on. Through a long grey hall.

"After-life," he mused. "So all is not symbolic applesauce as once I had suspected."

Another hallway angled in. A man came walking out briskly.

He joined the scholar. He clapped him smartly on the shoulder.

"Greetings, gate!" said the man.

Iverson Lord looked down his mobile Grecian nose.

"I beg your pardon," he said, distaste wrinkling his words.

"What do you know?" said the man. "How's life treating you? What do you know and what do you say?"

The semanticist drew back askance. The man forged on, arms and legs pumping mightily.

"What's new?" he was saying. "Give me the lowdown. Give me the dirt."

Two side halls. The man buzzed into one grey length. Another man appeared. He walked beside Iverson Lord. The poet looked at him narrowly. The man smiled broadly.

"Nice day, isn't it?"

"What place is this?" asked Iverson Lord.

"Nice weather we're having."

"I ask, what place is this?"

"Looks like it might turn out nice."

"Craven!" snapped Iverson Lord, stopping in his tracks. "Answer me!"

The man said, "Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody—"

"Silence!"

The semanticist watched the man turn into a side hallway. He shook his head. "Grotesque mummery," he said.

Another man appeared.

"Hi, you!" cried Iverson Lord. He ran. He clutched the man's grey sleeve. "What place is this?"

"You don't say?" said the man.

"You will answer me, sirrah!"

"Is that a fact?"

The poet sprayed wrath upon the man. His eyes popped. He grabbed the man's grey lapels. "You shall give intelligence or I shall throttle you!" he cried.

"Honest?"

Iverson Lord gaped. "What density is this?" he spoke incredulously. "Is this a man or a vegetable in my hands?"

"Well, knock me down and pick me up," said the man.

Something barren and chilling gripped the poet. He drew back, muttering in fear. He backed up.

Into an enormous room. Grey. Voices chattered. All alike.

"It's swell here," said a voice.

"It isn't black as pitch."

"It isn't cold as ice," said another.

The poet's eyes snapped about in confused fury. He saw blurred forms—seated, standing, reclining. He backed into a grey wall.

"It isn't mean as sin," a voice said.

"It isn't raining cats and dogs," said another.

"Avaunt." The ancient lips framed automatically. "I say —"

"Gee whiz, but it's super dandy swellelegant!" a voice laughed.

TO FIT THE CRIME

(Continued from page 55)

The poet sobbed. He ran. "Surcease," he moaned. "Surcease."

"I'm in the plumbing game," said a man running beside him.

"It's a rough game, the plumbing game," said the man.

A side hall. Iverson Lord plunged in. Frantically.

He ran past another room. He saw people cavorting around a grey Maypole.

"By George!" they cried in ecstasy. "Great Guns! Holy Mackerel! Jimminy!"

The scholar clapped gaunt fingers over his ears. He hurled on.

Now, as he ran, there started in his ears a murmuring.

A chorus singing: "A Stitch In Time Saves Nine. Time And Tide Wait For No Man. Early To Bed, Early To Rise. Too Many Cooks Spoil The Broth."

Iverson Lord cried out: "Gods of moulded symbol! *Pity!*"

The chorus hallelujahed: "Oh Boy! Wow! Gee Whiz! Hot Stuff!" Their voices swelled into a mighty: "Land O' Goshen!"

"Aaaaaah!" howled the poet. "Oh my God," he cried. "This is complete, unmitigated hell!"

"YOU SAID IT!" paeaned the chorus of thousands. "AIN'T IT THE TRUTH! OH WELL, YOU CAN'T LIVE FOREVER! THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES! HERE TODAY AND GONE TOMORROW! THAT'S LIFE!"

In four-part harmony.

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FANTASTIC

haven't paid the *POST* much attention in recent years. I picked up its last issue, read it, and decided I hadn't been missing a thing. But still I was sorry to see it go: it was an institution.

We prize our institutions, long after we cease to make use of them. Habit, mental reflex, loyalty to something for which we were once fond—we don't want to see our institutions crumble, even when we know they have already died within themselves.

This is an era of the smashing of icons. The end of this decade is witnessing the terrible fruition of a garden long untended. For years we smiled at our institutions and ignored them. And now our children are—for better or for worse—tearing them down.

Is it good? Who am I to say? It's Change. It may be for the ultimate good, or it may not. But Change is upon the land, and few of us can entirely resist it.

In the context of university demonstrations, ghetto riots, police fascism, and all the other actions and reactions which are tearing at the roots of our society's institutions, a preoccupation with the survival of science fiction magazines must seem remarkably petty. Yet, we must go on living, and we must go on caring for those institutions for which we still have need and regard. I happen to feel the need for science fiction as a part of my life (separate and distinct from my professional need for it as an area in which to earn my living)—and so must you, since you bought this magazine and are now reading it.

I started out talking about the need for a new and different kind of sf magazine. I was convinced, two years ago, that a wholly new approach to marketing and packaging was needed. With several friends I made a strong attempt to put together that

magazine myself.

The dummy of the first issue is sitting on my desk facing me as I write this. The title was *STELLAR Stories of Imagination*. The cover, which wrapped around to the back, was an abstract painting by Jack Gaughan—a work of fine art which he had originally done for his own pleasure. The names on that cover were Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany, Alexei Panshin, Ted White and Lee Hoffman—all writers who had donated stories without the expectation of any immediate financial return. Artists Gaughan, Gray Morrow, Jeff Jones, Steve Stiles and Mike Hinge did beautiful illustrations for the stories. The cover carried no date—only a number—and the price given was \$1.00. The projected content in wordage was high—more than that of any present sf magazine—but the price also reflected our decision to sell the magazine exclusively in bookstores, and not on the newsstands.

It was a cooperative venture, more than a trifle idealistic, and, unfortunately, woefully undercapitalized. Ultimately we floundered on the shoals of finance. That first issue was never completed.

And there died my dreams for a new and different kind of science fiction magazine. My basic mistake was in trusting myself to handle the publishing chores, because I am not business-minded, and I simply didn't have the necessary funds. I sank all I had, and all trusting pre-subscribers invested, into the magazine, but it wasn't enough. I have not yet refunded all those subscriptions, simply because the loss on my part was considerable.

But if the magazine died aborning, my faith in the material I selected for it has been vindicated. The Zelazny selection was part of a then-shelved

novel, since sold to Doubleday, and serialized in *IF*. My own story has since been published, also by *IF*. Lee Hoffman's novel—her first sf, although she has many fine westerns to her credit—was recently published by Ballantine. (If all goes well, you'll see her second—also originally scheduled for *STELLAR*—in these pages soon.) Alexei Panshin's fine short-short appears here, in this very issue. Other stories first offered me for *STELLAR*, including Lin Carter's unusual "A Guide to the City" and Terry Carr's "The Balance," will be appearing here, or in our sister magazine, *AMAZING STORIES*. So nothing has been lost. Except the time, money, and enthusiasm generated and donated to a lost cause.

But if *STELLAR* will never be born, at least I can bring you its fruits as the new editor of *FANTASTIC STORIES*: at least I can be certain that the fine and different stories will still reach you, their ultimate audience.

When I was putting *STELLAR* together, I told writers that I wanted the stories *they* believed in, but which no one wanted to buy. I was well aware that although every writer has his share of unsalable duds, he also often has locked away a manuscript or two which is too *different*, too outside the usual categories, and has not sold for that reason alone. By way of example, I point to Panshin's story in this issue. I read it, I was struck by it, and I asked him, "Why hasn't this sold long ago?"

The answer was depressingly familiar: "I guess it just didn't fit what the editors were looking for." True, "What's Your Excuse" is not precisely sf, in that its central point is contemporary, but at the same time it makes its point in an uniquely sf-oriented way—exactly that way which

non-sf editors cannot accept. Caught in a sort of editorial limbo, this fine story was left hanging, unsold, for literally years.

Likewise, "A Guide to the City," which will appear in our next issue. Totally unlike the action-adventure fantasy Lin Carter has become well-known by, this surreal fantasy has bounced from market to market, magazine to magazine, solely because it fell outside the editorial categories established by those magazines.

STELLAR was looking for those stories. So, now, is *FANTASTIC*. While our longer stories—like Jack Vance's "Emphyrio"—will be science-fantasy in nature, and will accent the more traditional story-values, our short stories will be—and can be—literally outside category. They can and will be the best of the experimental, New Wave, surreal—call it whatever you wish—which we are offered. Not every short story will necessarily be one of these, but in *FANTASTIC* they will have a home.

I started writing sf in 1962. For ten years prior to that, I was what is called "a fan." Science fiction fandom has a long and honorable history, and is unique in that no other genre of writing has spawned anything very much like it. Sf fandom has developed into a microcosm in which time has been condensed and social evolution is rapid. In the almost forty years of its existence, fandom has witnessed at least eight "Fandoms," or distinct generations.

Sf fandom exists because sf readers are above average in intelligence and verbal orientation—and thus eager to share their thoughts and enthusiasms. Early in its history, fandom created the "fanzine," the fan-published magazine (most often mimeographed) in which amateur journalism has flour-

ished as nowhere else.

Reflecting this fact, we have launched a new feature this issue, *Fantasy Fandom*, and I think its introduction will make its function clear.

My own career in fandom was (and is) typical. I became a fan early in my teens, soon began contributing stories and drawings to the fanzines I read, and eventually, inevitably, began publishing fanzines of my own. Anyone with twenty or thirty dollars can publish a fanzine—their circulations run from 100 copies to three or four hundred; my first was mailed to thirty-five selected fans—and titles proliferate endlessly.

Once one becomes involved in fandom, one finds himself in a remarkably self-contained social structure with its own traditions, mores, values, and friendships. Since the late thirties fans have been holding conclaves and conventions; the club-forming instincts go back even earlier. Today there is at least one regional conference or convention for every month of the year but three, in the United States alone. And fandom is now—like sf itself—worldwide.

In 1967 I was co-chairman of the 25th World Science Fiction Convention, the NyCon3, here in New York City. It was an exhausting chore, but one in which I took great pride. The World Conventions are now listed among major conventions by the hotel associations, and after putting one on, I can easily understand why.

This year the 27th World Science Fiction Convention will be held in St. Louis, at the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, chaired by long-time fan (and editor of the fanzine, ODD) Ray Fisher. The World Convention is the event of the year, and attracts hundreds of fans and scores of professionals, many

of whom will appear as speakers and panelists on the program. In addition to the scheduled program, there is the Awards Banquet, at which the year's Hugo awards (the Oscars of sf) are announced and handed out, and the Guest of Honor speaks. In recent years, there have been two Guests of Honor—one from the professional ranks and one a major fan. This year the committee decided to honor two men who have been active both as professionals and as fans: illustrator Jack Gaughan is the Pro/Fan Guest of honor, and yours truly is the Fan/Pro Guest of Honor. So you can be sure I'll be there with something to say when the moment arrives.

In addition to these scheduled items, of course, will be nighttime showings of movies, many room parties, auctions of original manuscripts and artwork, a masquerade hall (featuring rock bands), and a lot more.

It all takes place over the Labor Day weekend—August 29th through September first—and it's the St. Louiscon. You can join the convention now, and take part in the Hugo voting; memberships are \$3.00 (supporting) or \$4.00 (attending), and the convention's address is: St. Louiscon, P.O. Box 3008, St. Louis, Missouri, 63130. Make your check payable to St. Louiscon. An added bonus will be the Progress Reports, which you'll receive as they're published.

If you've always wanted to meet your favorite authors, if the whole crazy business of fandom intrigues you, if you want to meet the editor of this magazine, or if you just want to talk with other people who share your interest in sf, the St. Louiscon is the place to go.

See you there!

—Ted White

THE

STAR DUMMY

BY ANTHONY BOUCHER



Illustrator: Tom Beecham

Anthony Boucher died in the spring of 1968, and suddenly an institution had perished. A man of many interests—and an equal number of talents—he was best known as a book reviewer (he reviewed mysteries for the New York Times, and, in earlier years, science fiction for the New York Herald-Tribune), editor (he co-founded The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, and is remembered as that magazine's best editor), anthologist, music critic (he had a radio program on the Pacifica FM stations)—and also as a never prolific, but always fascinating author of unusual fantasies. Here is one of those rarest of stories, a warm-hearted tale of alien invaders—



" . . . it's something — outside of me," Paul Peters found himself saying. "I've read stories, Father, about . . . losing control. It sounded absurd. But this is real. It . . . he talks to me."

It was close and dark in the booth, but Paul could almost see the slow smile spreading from the Paulist priest. "My son, I know that anonymity is usual in the confessional booth. But since there is only one professional ventriloquist in this parish, it's a little hard to maintain in this case, isn't it? And knowing you as I do outside of the confessional, Paul, does make a difference in advising you. You



say that your dummy —"

"Chuck Woodchuck," Paul muttered venomously.

"Chuck talks back to you, says things not in your mind?"

"Yes."

"Not even in your subconscious mind?"

"Can my conscious mind answer that?"

"Question withdrawn. Paul, to certain souls I might say simply fast and pray. To others I might suggest consulting with the Archbishop for permission for a formal exorcism. To you, however, I think I might make a more materialistic recommendation: see an analyst."

Paul groaned in the darkness. "It's more than that. It's something *outside* of me. . . ."

"Occam's razor," the Paulist murmured. "With your fondness for science fiction, you'll appreciate that. See if the simplest answer works. If it doesn't, we can discuss less materialistic causes. See an analyst. And perhaps you needn't offend the good doctor by telling him that I also advise prayer along with his treatment."

" . . . and I see no reason," the eminent analyst concluded, "why we should not dispel your demon in a relatively brief time. In fact, young man, we'll leave you in better shape than when you started having these hallucinations. Your choice of profession is

of course highly symptomatic. A predilection for ventriloquism clearly indicates a basically schizoid personality, which chooses to externalize one portion of itself."

Paul brought his attention back from the splendid view of the Bay. "And you'll fix that up?"

The analyst deigned to smile. "Easily, I hope."

"I don't know," Paul ventured, "if you've heard of a friend of mine named Joe Henderson? Writes science fiction?"

"That escapist dianetics-spawning rubbish?" the analyst exclaimed, as if each word were spelled with four letters.

"As you say. My friend went to an analyst, and in the course of the first interview mentioned his profession. 'Aha!' said the doctor gleefully. 'We'll soon put a stop to that nonsense!'"

"Sound attitude," the analyst agreed.

"Only it occurred to Joe that then how was he going to pay his bills — including, of course, the doctor's. So somehow Joe never did get himself analyzed. . . ."

Paul got up hesitantly. "I'm a professional ventriloquist, Doctor. I'm a good one. I make good money. At least, I used to when . . ." his voice became a little unsteady for a trained ventriloquist, or even for a normal man . . . "when Chuck was nothing more than an amusingly carved piece of wood. It's the

only business I know. If you 'cure' me of it, well — Othello's occupation's gone."

"This Othello." The analyst's eyes sharpened. "Another externalization? Does he speak to you too?"

"Tell you what," said Paul. "I'll send Chuck in to see you. He'll tell you more about me than I can."

Which was perfectly true, Paul thought as he rode down fifteen stories. Could anyone, even the psychiatrist — even the priest — imagine what it was like to sit there awake all night in the dark room with the carved wood telling you all about yourself? All the little indecencies, the degradations of humanity hidden deep under your thoughts. Taunting you with the baseness of your flesh viewed with a cold contempt which only wood could feel. Sitting there listening, listening and feeling the contempt probe ever more deeply, ever more accurately.

Somehow he was on the sidewalk in front of the office building, shaking so violently that he suddenly had to force his hands around the standard of a No-Parking sign to keep himself erect.

Fortunately, this was San Francisco, where no one is ever far from a bar. When he was capable again of freeing one hand from the standard, he made the sign of the cross and moved off. A brief wordless prayer and two

wordless straight bourbons later he knew, since he could not return to the room where the wood lay, the best place for him that afternoon.

The zoo is a perfect place for relaxation, for undoing internal knots. Paul had often found it so when baffled by script problems, or by the idiosyncrasies of agencies and sponsors. Here are minds of a different order, a cleaner, freer creation to which you can abandon yourself, oblivious of human complexities.

He knew most of the animals by sight as individuals, and he had even acquired a better-than-nodding acquaintance with many of the attendants. It was one of these who literally bumped into him as he stood in front of the parrot cage, and proceeded to make the afternoon far more distracting than he had ever anticipated.

"Tim!" Paul exclaimed. "Where on earth are you running to? Or from? Lion escaped or what?"

"Mr. Peters!" the attendant gasped. "I been chasing all over the place making phone calls to God knows who all. There's something screwy going on over in the wombats'."

"It couldn't pick a better place," Paul smiled. "Catch your breath a minute and tell me what gives."

"Got a cigarette? Thanks. Well, Mr. Peters, I'll tell you: couple of times lately some of the boys they say they see something funny in one of the cages. Somebody checks up, it's always gone. Only today it's in there with the wombats and everybody's looking at it and nobody knows what —"

Paul Peters had always had a highly developed sense of curiosity. (Schizoid externalization? he reflected. No, cancel that. You're forgetting things. This may be fun.) He was already walking toward the wombats' enclosure as he asked, "This thing. What does it look like?"

"Well, Mr. Peters, it's pretty much like a koala," Tim explained, "except for where it's like an anteater."

Paul was never able to better that description. With the exception, of course, that neither koalas nor anteaters have six-digited forepaws with opposing thumbs. But that factor was not obvious on first glance.

He could see the thing now, and it was in body very much like an outsize koala — that oddly charming Australian eucalyptus-climber after whom the Teddy bear was patterned. It had no visible pouch — but then it might be a male — and its ears were less prominent. Its body was about two feet long. And its face was nothing like the flat and permanently startled visage of the koala,

but a hairless expanse sloping from a high forehead, past sharp bright eyes, to a protracted proboscis which did indeed resemble nothing so much as the snout of an anteater.

The buzz through which they pushed their way consisted chiefly of "What *is* that?" and "I don't know," with an occasional treble obligato of "Why don't you know, Daddy?"

But it was not what it was so much as what it was doing that fascinated Paul. It concentrated on rubbing its right forepaw in circles on the ground, abruptly looking up from time to time at the nearest wombat, while those stumpy marsupials either stared at it detachedly or backed away with suspicion.

"When the other boys saw it," Paul asked, "what was it doing then?"

"It's funny you ask that, Mr. Peters, on account of that's one of the things that's funny about it. What it was doing, I mean. One time when it was in with the llamas it was doing like this, just playing in the dirt."

"Playing?" Paul wondered softly.

"Only when it was in with the monkeys it was chattering at them something fierce, just like a monkey too, this guy said. And when it was in with the lions, well I'm not asking you to believe this and God knows I didn't yesterday

and I don't know as I do now, but this other guy says it give a roar just like a lion. Only not *just* like, of course, because look at it, but like as if you didn't have your radio turned up quite enough."

"Wombats don't make much noise, do they? Or llamas?" All right, Paul said to himself. You're crazy. This is worse than wood talking; but it's nicer. And there is a pattern. "Tim," he said abruptly, "can you let me in the wombat enclosure?"

"Jeez, Mr. Peters, there's big-shots coming from the University and . . . But you did give us that show for free at the pension benefit and . . . And," Tim concluded more firmly as he tucked the five unobtrusively into his pocket, "can do, I guess. O.K., everybody! Let's have a little room here. Got to let Dr. Peters in!"

Paul hesitated at the gate. This was unquestionably either the most momentous or the most ridiculous effort he had made in a reasonably momentous-ridiculous life. "Joe Henderson, thou shouldst be with me at this hour!" he breathed, and went in.

He walked up to where the creature squatted by its circles.

He knelt down beside it and pointed his forefinger, first at the small central circle with the lines sticking out all around it, then up at the sun. Next he tapped his finger insistently on the unmarked

ground, then thrust it at the large dot on the third of the bigger concentric circles.

The creature looked up at him, and for the first time in his life Paul understood just what Keats had meant by *a wild surmise*. He saw it on the creature's face, and he felt it thrill through his own being.

An animal who can draw, an animal who can recognize a crude diagram of the solar system, is rational — is not merely a beast like the numbly staring wombats.

Hastily the creature held up a single digit of one forepaw and then drew a straight line in the dirt. Paul did the same, with an amused sudden realization of the fact that the figure *one* is probably a straight line in almost any system.

The creature held up two fingers and made an odd squiggle. Paul held up two fingers and made our own particular odd squiggle which is shaped 2. They almost raced each other through the next three numbers.

At the squiggle shape 5, the creature looked at Paul's five fingers, hesitated, then advanced by a daring step. It held up both its hands, each with its six digits, and made a straight line followed by an *S*-shaped curve.

Paul thought frantically, and wished that he had majored in mathematics. He held up his ten fingers, then marked down a

straight line followed by a circle. The creature paused a moment, as if rapidly calculating. Then it nodded, looked carefully at Paul's 2 squiggle, held up its own twelve fingers again, and wrote down 12.

Paul sank back on his heels. This twelve-fingered being had, as was plausible, a duodecimal system, based on twelve as our decimal system is on ten. And it had almost instantaneously grasped the human ten-system so well as to write down its *twelve* in our method.

"Friend," said Paul softly, pitching his voice too low for the crowds outside the enclosure, "you can't understand my language; but in the name of God and Man, welcome to Earth."

"Oh dear," said the creature, "you communicate only by speech! And otherwise you seem such a highly rational being."

Paul gulped. "That's an accusation I haven't had leveled against me recently."

"I never dreamed," it went on, "that the beings shaped like you were the rational ones. I couldn't get any waves from them. I can from you, though, even enough to pick up the language."

"And you got waves from the other animals," Paul mused. "That's why you chattered like a monkey and roared like a lion-not-turned-up-enough. Only they didn't understand your diagrams, so you knew they weren't high

enough for you to deal with."

"But why do you have waves and not the others?"

"I am not," said Paul hastily, "a mutant. We can figure out why later. The trouble right now, if I know anything about the people-without-waves, is that nobody's going to believe a word of this scene. As if indeed I did. But it's nicer than wood. . . ."

The creature shuddered, then apologized. "I'm sorry. Something I touched in there. . . ."

"I know," said Paul, abruptly grave and humble. "Maybe we can help each other. God grant. I'm taking a chance—but I think the first thing is to get you out of here before Tim's 'bigshots from the University' show up and maybe decide to dissect you. Will you trust me?"

The pause was a long one—long enough for Paul to think of all the vile weakness of his humanity and know his infinite unworthiness of trust. He could hear the words pouring forth from the wood—and then the creature said simply, "Yes".

And the wood was silent even in memory.

Never, Paul felt, had he invested twenty dollars more wisely. And never had he discovered such unsuspected inborn acting talent as Tim's. There was something approaching genius, in a pure vein of Stanislavsky realism, in

Tim's denunciation of Paul as a publicity-seeker — in his explanation to the crowd that the koala-like object was a highly ingenious mechanical dummy planted here by a venal ventriloquist who had planned to "discover" it as some strange being and trade on the good name of the Zoo itself for his own selfish promotional advancement. Bitter lashings of denunciation followed Paul and the creature as they departed — a matter of minutes, Tim confessed *sotto voce*, before the professors from across the Bay were due.

Now they were parked by the beach in Paul's convertible. Sensibly, he felt he should head for home and privacy; but he still could not quite bring himself to enter that room where Chuck Woodchuck waited.

"First of all, I suppose," he ventured, "comes: what's your name?"

"The nearest, my dear Paul, that your phonetics can come to it is something like *Tarvish*."

"Glad to meet you. Now — how did you know mine? But of course," he added hastily, "if you can read . . . Well, next: where are you from? Mars?"

Tarvish thought. "Mars . . . Ah, you mean the fourth planet? All that sand . . ." He shuddered as if at a memory of infinite boredom. "No. I'm from a planet called Earth, which revolves around a star called the sun."

"Look!" Paul exclaimed. "Fun's fun, but isn't this a little too much of a muchness? This is Earth. That ball getting low over there is the sun. And you —"

"Don't you understand?" The tip of Tarvish's nose twitched faintly. "Then ask me what kind of a creature I am, what race I belong to."

"All right, Mr. Bones, I'm asking."

"I," said Tarvish, twitching violently, "am a man."

It took Paul a minute to interpret; then his laugh, his first free laugh in days, was as loud as Tarvish's twitching was vigorous. "Of course. Everybody has a name for everything in the universe — everything *else*. But there aren't names for your own race or your own planet or your own star. You're *men*, you're *people*, you live on the *earth*, you're warmed by the *sun*. I remember reading that some Indian languages were like that: the name for the tribe meant simply *the people* and the name for their country was just *the land*. We've smiled at that, and interplanetarily we're doing the same damned thing. All right — where is *your sun*?"

"How can I tell you? You don't know our system of spatial coördinates. I don't understand what I find in your mind about 'constellations', meaningless pictures which look different from

any two points in space, or 'light-years', because your *year* doesn't convey a time-meaning to me."

"It's three hundred and sixty-five days."

"And what is a *day*?"

"Twenty-four — no, skip it. I can see that this is going to be a lot tougher than Joe Henderson and his friends think. Let's start over again. How did you get here?"

Two minutes later Paul repeated the question.

"I've been thinking," said Tarvish. "Trying to find the words in your mind. But they aren't there. Your words make too sharp a distinction between matter and energy. If I say 'a spaceship', you will think of a metal structure. If I say 'a force field', you will picture me traveling in something immaterial. Both are wrong."

"Let's try again. Why did you —" Paul stopped abruptly.

The nose twitched. "No," said Tarvish gently, "I am not the advance guard of an invasion and you are not betraying your race by being human to me. Please forget your science-fiction friends. We men of Earth have no desire to take over any of the planets of this star; ever since our terrible experience with the —" it sounded a little like *Khrj* "— we have made it a firm rule never to land on an inhabited planet."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Because . . ." Tarvish hesitated. A faint blue colored the root of his nose. "Because my girl is here."

"I'm improving," Paul said. "It took me only five seconds to adjust to that *girl*. You're in love?" Oddly, he didn't even feel like smiling.

"That's why I had to land. You see, she went off by herself in the . . . I think if I invent the word 'space dinghy' it will give you the idea. I warned her that the . . . well, an important part was defective; but we had just had a small quarrel and she insisted on spiting me. She never came back. That's why I had to make contact with intelligent life to learn something of the planet which I have to search."

"Only the intelligent life doesn't have waves. Except me because, God help me, I expect strange things to speak. You need a combination of Sherlock Holmes and Frank Buck, and you're stuck with a possibly not quite sane ventriloquist."

"You will help me? When you see her!" Tarvish was almost rapturous. "The most beautiful girl, I swear, on the whole earth. With," he added reminiscently, "the finest pair of ears in the universe." On the word *ears* his voice sank a little, and the blue tinge deepened at the root of his proboscis.

The universe, Paul smiled to

himself, must provide a fascinating variety of significant secondary sexual characteristics. "If I can help you," he said sincerely, "I'll try. I'll do my best. And in the meantime we've the little problem of feeding you. I'll have to take you —" he tensed a little — home. I suppose, that is, you do eat?"

"So far as we have observed," Tarvish pronounced solemnly, "all races of rational beings eat and sleep and . . ." The blue was again intensified.

"And relish a fine pair of ears," Paul concluded for him. "Definition of rationality." He started the car.

By the next morning Paul Peters had learned a number of things.

He had learned that men of Tarvish's race are, as they choose, bipeds or quadrupeds. When they entered the Montgomery Block, that sprawling warren of odd studios where Paul lived, Tarvish had trotted behind him on all fours "because," he said, "it would be less conspicuous," as indeed was true. He was only by a small margin the most unusual of the animal and human companions whom Montgomery Block denizens had brought home, few of whom — including the humans — were at the moment functionally bipedal. But once inside the studio apartment, he seemed to

prefer the erect posture.

Between them they had worked out the problem of feeding. The proboscidiferous Tarvish was of course edentate, and accustomed to subsisting on liquids and pap. Milk, raw eggs and tomato juice sufficed him for the time being — a surprisingly simple diet to contain most of the requisite vitamins and proteins. Later Paul planned to lay in a supply of prepared baby foods, and looked forward to the astonishment of the clerk at the nearby chain store who knew him as a resolute bachelor.

Paul had also learned an astonishing amount, considering the relative brevity of the conversation, concerning the planet which was to Tarvish *the earth* — from its socio-economic systems to the fascinating fact that at present fine full, ripe ears were, as any man would prefer, in style, whereas only a generation ago they had been unaccountably minimized and even strapped down. Paul's amused explanation of the analogy on this earth served perhaps as much as anything to establish an easy man-to-man intimacy. Tarvish went so far as to elaborate a plan for introducing gradually inflatable false earlobes on his earth. It was never quite clear to Paul how an edentate being could speak so easily, but he imagined that the power resembled his own professional skill.

All of these strange thoughts

coursed through Paul's head as he lay slowly waking up the next morning; and it was only after several minutes of savoring them that he perceived the wonderful background note that served as their ground-bass. Not since the first difficult instant of entering the apartment had he so much as thought of the corner of the main room in which Chuck Woodchuck lay.

"You know, Tarvish," Paul said as they finished breakfast, "I like you. You're easy to be with."

"Thank you, Paul." The root of the proboscis blushed faintly blue. "I like you too. We could spend happy days simply talking, exchanging, learning to know. . . . But there is Vishta."

"Vishta?"

"My girl. I dreamed about her last night, Paul. . . ." Tarvish gave a little sigh, rose, and began bipedally to pace the room. "Your earth is enormous, even though the figures you tell me convey no meaning to me. Whatever a square mile means, one hundred and ninety-seven million of them must represent quite an area. There must be some way. . . ."

"Look," Paul said. "Before we tackle the problem again, let's try restating it. (A), we must find Vishta. But that doesn't necessarily mean literally, physically, Dr. Livingstone-I-presume *find*, does it? She'll be over the lovers' quarrel by now; she'll want to get

back to the — you'll pardon the expression — spaceship. If we can let her know where you are, that's enough, isn't it?"

Tarvish rubbed the tip of his large nose. "I should think so."

"All right. Restate the restatement. (A), get word to Vishta. (B), without revealing your interplanetary presence to the world at large. Both because it's against your mores and because I think it'll cause just too damned much trouble. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

The two sat in silence for perhaps five minutes. Paul alternately cudgeled his brains, and addressed brief prayers to the Holy Ghost for assistance in helping this other creature of God. Meanwhile, his eyes drifted around the apartment, and for a moment rested on the noble two-volume Knopf edition of Poe.

"My God in Heaven!" he exclaimed. The most devout could not have considered this a violation of the decalog. "Look, Tarvish. We have in our literature a story called *The Purloined Letter*. Its point is that the most over-obvious display can be the subtlest concealment."

"The point occurs in our folklore as well," said Tarvish. "But I don't —" Suddenly he stopped.

Paul grinned. "Did you get a wave? But let me go on out loud — this race is happier that way. Yes, we had it all solved yesterday

and let it slip. The lie we bribed Tim to tell —"

"— that I am your new dummy," Tarvish picked up eagerly.

"The act'll be sensational. Because you can really talk, I can do anything. Eat soda crackers while you're talking — it won't make any difference. And you — I hate like hell to say this to any man, but from an audience viewpoint it's true — you're *cute*. You're damned near cuddly. They'll love you. And we bill you with the precise truth: you're a visitant from outer space. It ties a ventriloquism act into the science-fiction trend in TV. You're THE STAR DUMMY. We'll make a fortune — not that I'm thinking of that —"

"Aren't you?" Tarvish asked dryly.

Paul smiled. "Can anyone be a hypocrite in a telepathic civilization?"

"It's been known to happen."

"Well, anyway, I'm not thinking *primarily* of the fortune. We'll get publicity we couldn't buy. And wherever she is, unless it's in Darkest Africa or behind the Iron Curtain, Vishta'll learn where you are."

"Paul," said Tarvish solemnly, "you're inspired. On that I could use a drink."

"Another custom of all rational races?"

"Nearly all. But just a moment: I find in your mind the con-

cept *alcohol*. I'm afraid that doesn't convey much."

Paul tried to think back to his high-school chemistry. Finally he ventured, " C_2H_5OH . That help any?"

"Ah, yes. More correctly, of course, CH_3CH_2OH . You find that mild fluid stimulating? We use it somewhat in preparing food, but . . . Now, if I might have a little $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$?"

Paul rubbed his head. "Doesn't mean a thing to me. Sounds like some kind of alkaloid. It's the touch of nitrogen that does it with you people?"

"But indeed you do know it. You were drinking it at breakfast. And I must say I admired the ease with which you put away so much strong liquor so early in the day."

Hastily Paul checked in a dictionary. "*Caffein*," he groaned. "And what do you use to sober up? A few cups of good straight alcohol, no cream?"

And in copious shots of C_2H_5OH and $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$ the two men pledged the future of THE STAR DUMMY.

So now you see at last to what this story has been leading. What began in a confessional and passed through an analyst's office to a zoo — all symbolism is read into the sequence at your own peril — is in actuality the backstage story of the genesis of your own favorite television program.

Most of the rest of that genesis you know from a thousand enthusiastic recounts, from John Crosby's in the *Herald Tribune* to Phillip Hamburger's in the *New Yorker*: how network producers at first greeted Paul Peters skeptically when he returned to show business, after a mysterious absence, with a brand-new type of act; how THE STAR DUMMY was at first somewhat hesitantly showcased on *San Francisco Presents*; how the deluge of fan mail caused that first showing to be kinnied all over the country, while the next week a live performance shot over the nation on micro-wave relay; how the outrageous concept of a cuddlesome dummy from Outer Space managed unbelievably to combine the audiences of

Charlie McCarthy and *Space Cadet*; how Star Dummies outgrossed the combined total sales of Sparkle Plenty dolls and Hopalong Cassidy suits.

But there are a few untold backstage scenes which you should still hear.

Scene: Station KMNX-TV. Time: the morning after the first Star Dummy broadcast. Speaker: a vice-president.

"But my God, M.N., there's all hell popping. That was Hollywood on the phone. They've got the same damned show lined up for show-casing next week. Same format — identical dummy — only maybe theirs has bigger ears. The property owner's flying up here and our lawyers had better be good!"

Scene: Same. Time: that afternoon.

"I think," Paul had said, "that we might be able to reach a settlement out of court." The vice-presidents had filed out eagerly, the lawyers somewhat reluctantly.

Once he had been introduced to Vishta (and so close had he come, in weeks, of preparing the show, to Tarvish's ways of thinking that he found her enchantingly lovely), it would have been inconceivable rude and prying to do anything but turn his back on the reunion of the lovers. Which meant that he had to keep his



"Persistent cuss, isn't he?"

eyes on Marcia Judd, property owner of the Hollywood show.

"I'm not a professional ventriloquist like you, Mr. Peters," she was saying. "I couldn't do a thing without Vishta. But when we talked about it, it seemed the most logical way to let Tarvish know where she was. You know, like *The Purloined Letter*."

"And you have waves?" Paul marveled. It was about the only thing which she did not obviously have on first glance.

"I guess maybe it's because I write fantasy and stf. Oh, I don't sell much, but a little. And I'm not too sure that there's *anything* that can't happen. So when I was walking through the San Diego zoo and I saw something in with the koalas that was making diagrams . . . Well, I couldn't help remembering Joe's story about inter-cultural communication —"

"Joe Henderson? You know old Joe?"

"He's helped me a lot. I guess you'd sort of say I'm his protegee."

"So long," Paul smiled, "as he isn't your protector. But tell me, does Joe still . . ."

And one half of the room was as happy in the perfect chatter of a first meeting as was the other half in the perfect silence of a long-delayed reunion.

Truth had shifted again, and THE STAR DUMMY was in fact a dummy — a brilliantly con-

structed piece of mechanism which had eaten up the profits of the three shows on which Tarvish himself appeared. But the show was set now, and Paul's own professional skill could carry it from this point on. And the highly telegenic presence of Marcia Judd did no harm.

Paul's car stopped by a lonely stretch of beach south of the city.

"We can find what you like to call the spaceship from here," said Tarvish. "I'd sooner you didn't see it. I think it would only confuse you."

"We love you both," said Vishta gently. "God bless you."

"God!" Marcia exclaimed. "Don't tell me people with a science like yours believe in God!"

Paul sighed. "I hope you don't mind too much that I'm such a barbarian."

"It's your conditioning," said Marcia. "But with them . . .!"

"And *your* conditioning, Marcia," Tarvish observed, "has driven you the other way? Yes, I do believe in God in a way — if less devoutly than Paul, or at least than Paul being devout. Many do on our earth; not all, but many. There was once a man, or possibly more than a man. We argue about that. His name was Hraz, and some call him the Oiled One." Marcia smiled and Tarvish added, "It refers to a ceremony of honor. I am not quite a follower

of Hraz, and yet when I pray — as I did, Paul, shortly before you found me — it is in words that Hraz taught us."

"Which are?"

"We'll say them together," said Vishta. "It makes a good good-bye."

And the lovers recited:

Lifegiver over us, there is blessing in the word that means you. We pray that in time we will live here under your rule as others now live with you there; but in the meantime feed our bodies, for we need that here and now. We are in debt to you for everything, but your love will not hold us accountable for this debt; and so we too should deal with others, holding no man to strict balances of account. Do not let us meet temptations stronger than we can bear; but let us prevail and be free of evil.

Then they were gone, off down the beach.

Marcia sniffled away a tear. "It is *not* the prayer," she protested indignantly. "But they were so nice. . . ."

"Yes," said the Paulist at Old St. Mary's, "you may tell your fiancée to come in next Thursday at three to start her pre-marital instruction."

"You'll find her a tartar, Father," Paul grinned.

"Atheism can be the most fanatical of religions. Thank Heaven my duty is only to inform, not to convert her. I'm glad you're getting married, Paul. I don't think anything inside or outside of you will denounce the flesh so violently again. Did the analysis help you?"

"Somehow I never got around to it. Things started happening."

"Now this . . . ah . . . document," the Paulist went on. "Really extraordinary. *Lifegiver over us* . . . Terribly free, of course, but still an unusually stimulating, fresh translation of the *Pater Noster*. I've shown it to Father Massini — he was on the Bishops' Committee for the revised translation of the New Testament — and he was delighted. Where on earth did you get it?"

"Father, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"No?" asked the priest.

FROM the April 1900 issue of *Scientific American*: "An automobile recently covered the distance from Coventry to London, 92 miles, in four hours, this being an average of 23 miles an hour."

Pull over, bud. You going to a funeral?

FANTASY BOOKS

THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST, by Philip Jose Farmer, Essex House, \$1.95
THE ENDLESS ORGY, by Richard E. Geis, Brandon House, \$1.25
SEASON OF THE WITCH, by Hank Stine, Essex House, \$1.95, Box 9506 or 7311 Fulton Ave., North Hollywood, Calif. 91605

Reviewed by
FRITZ LEIBER

Combine hard-core sex with science fantasy?

Only thirty years ago, back in the dawn of the Golden Age of *Amazing Stories*, this might well have been voted the least likely to transpire of all literary extrapolations.

Now it is reality. The results are provocative.

The prices—for hard core in soft covers—seem a trifle high. But then one must always be prepared to pay for sex, one way or another.

Be it noted that Brandon and Essex Houses are not fly-by-night publishers. They give their street address, Regent House is their third name. Theodore Sturgeon supplies an excellent justificatory afterword to Farmer's novel; Harlan Ellison does the same for Stine's. Brandon House alone lists about 325 available titles. Of these, four out of five are fiction and all hard-core sex or close to it, to judge by titles. Of the remaining 65 non-fiction books, eight are fairly clearly—again judging chiefly by titles—not about sex, though they indicate how Brandon House assesses the general outlook and secondary preoccupations

of its readers: *Marihuana—Myths and Realities* (a very sound book in my judgment), *Snap Back From Your Heart Attack, Smoke Without Panic, Take Your Traffic Ticket to Court—and Win!*, etc. The last three titles fit with the impression I get that Brandon House is a trifle over-enthusiastic about cure-alls, in particular that provided by sexual experience.

For at least the past fifty years, about half of all serious fiction writers have been working quite hard at breaking down taboos against sex in fiction—a very necessary, occasionally risky, and ultimately thankless job, since the usual results are books that are sexually dated. The other half took the attitude summed up by an early writer-friend of mine: "Until it's possible to describe exactly what happens in the act, I won't touch sex in my books."

Now, as a result of the labors of the other fifty percent and their publishers, it is becoming permissible to describe exactly what happens in the act. This is, to my mind, a great achievement, not the least of its secondary consequences being the likelihood of less sex crime.

The primary result is paradoxical, though I believe it should have been obvious to any sound psychologist: Once you get used to it—and this, believe me, takes a little doing, or rather reading—hard-core sex is neither disgusting nor at all titillating. At its worst, it becomes clinical; at its best, simply one more aspect of the scene.

So long as the least taboo area remains, going just a tiny step farther,

or merely having the writer hint that he may do so, produces excitement in the reader. Drop all taboos, and that sort of excitement vanishes, usually with disconcerting rapidity—exactly as an honest story about war tends to spoil, at least for a while, the appeal of flag-waving romances.

The alimentation analogy is clarifying. The entertainment value of at least any light novel is enhanced by two or three listings of the items in a good meal, along with a brief but glamorous description of their appearance when served. Many detective and suspense story writers have used this to advantage. I recall in particular some of the meals in Ian Fleming's novels: the serving of caviare with all its trimmings in *Casino Royale*, Bond's dinner with M. at Blades in *Moonraker*. One disadvantage to be noted, however, is that not everyone likes or even tolerates caviare; if a person detests seafood, no description of bouillabaisse (being sure to use the fish obtainable only in Marseilles and not to forget the crab legs) is going to make his mouth water except in anticipation of nausea, though perhaps a superlatively well-written description may win from him a momentary suspension of belief in his own allergy; very much the same, incidentally, goes for disliked erotic variants—though one must remember that in this area a dislike sometimes turns out to be an id's-like.

But the detailed and complete description of the chewing and swallowing of even a superlative meal, along with attendant salivation, belching, feelings of partial repletion, etc., swiftly becomes boring and eventually distasteful. Something highly pleasurable in the doing becomes wearisome in the

recounting, chiefly because eating, like making love, involves highly repetitive actions. This is by no means to say that such descriptions, even the completest, are to be avoided or minimized. On the contrary, they are welcome and very useful so long as they vividly depict life (including its painful and uncomfortable aspects), throw light on character, comment on society, or simply entertain. As in all aspects of fiction, selection is crucial. As always, writer and reader must both judge. And of course, these are entirely aesthetic and in no way moral matters.

Here it should be noted that the sex act is generally a far more fruitful topic for fiction than is the meal, because it is—at least in my experience—less frequent, less accurately known, especially in its many varieties, and rather more likely to open the subconscious mind with consequent opportunities for the writer to reveal character and its sources and substrata.

However, the novel that is all hardcore sex acts will eventually induce a clinical or at any rate semi-professional and somewhat technical outlook in its reader, just as one can hardly read fifty recipes for good meals, or closely study a diagram for cutting up a side of beef, without taking on something of a cook's point of view rather than simply that of a potentially hungry human being. No matter; there have been many highly successful novels written about professional matters and folk: doctors, nurses, soldiers, scientists (very few good novels about them), sea captains, revolutionaries, actors and the like.

And it must be remembered that all novels are reflective rather than triggering; police procedural novels do not cause us to rush into the street and

make citizen's arrests, mountain-climbing novels do not hypnotize us into becoming human flies on our houses or apartment buildings, etc.

The sex novel may stand by itself, or it may be combined with elements of mainstream, detective, espionage, western, etc., or as in the case of the three books under view here, science fantasy. And in every case sex may be simply part of the scene or it may tend to predominate, as it again does here.

Although he has already had published the lead-in novel *The Sex Machine* (and apparently intends to follow up *The Endless Orgy* with a novel about Sister Purity, the Iron Virgin), Richard Geis is chiefly an experienced writer of straight sex-novels. Mainly for this reason, I think, his novel is the clearest and has the best pace of the three, though the clarity occasionally verges on barrenness and the pace on weariness.

The Endless Orgy is a farce with moments of powerful social criticism, an anti-*Brave New World* in which the hero, a Lover, First Class, time-travels from a future society in which the social basics are "Life is sacred" and "Pleasure is good" into our present or immediate future, where he finds the basics to be "Life is cheap," "Pleasure is had," and Sex is evil."

Very wisely, Geis has equipped his hero with limitations as well as powers. He has psi, but only for desire-signals from nearby females, and he is so constituted that he must instantly move to satisfy those desires if they reach a certain peak. Also, his own desires must be satisfied every few days or he sickens and dies. And he has not been trained in karate. These make for delightful plot complications such as

those springing from Asimov's three laws of robotics, and Geis realizes them well.

The peripheral comedy is somewhat first-thought: girls named Honi Brest, Suzy Cum-Cum, and Liz Dildoux, a Chinese security agent called I. Ching, a Cherman surgeon (von Klamp—who else?) who says things like, "Ja, diszsection (dizsegction?) is nod goot mit der hoat moofing like dis" (I myself have a vast weakness for those Katzenjammer-Kids—and *Strangelove*—professors), two hundred feet of an American-financed six-lane superhighway built near the mid-African capital of Ruttaville, etc. But then farce always tempts one to use the nearest humor at hand (as I learned writing *The Silver Eggheads* and *A Specter Is Haunting Texas*) and besides, the hard-core sex novel still does not pay enough to make careful recasting, rewriting and polishing financially feasible.

Hank Stine's *Season of the Witch* is a first novel written somewhat in the Harlan-Ellison style of passion, pain, real pluck, and occasionally screaming prose. The author has a good eye for physical detail, especially the disturbing sort, and a strong feeling for the human predicament, but these very abilities sometimes lead him into overly long close-ups of human faces and instants of awareness.

The premise (I give nothing away—it's in a cover blurb) is that of a young sex murderer sentenced to spend the rest of his life in the soul-bereft but revitalized body of his female victim. This general ploy, used by writers as diverse as Thorne Smith and Lovecraft, and a difficult one to make science-fictionally plausible, enables the author to concentrate effectively, but perhaps too exclusively, on

the physical differences between a man and a woman. Also, it is not easy to believe in a society which has such psychophysical techniques available, but is otherwise almost indistinguishable from our own, especially in its restaurants and bathrooms and in its confrontations between police and hippies.

For the protagonist's final acceptance of his new female role is largely achieved when he is accepted unquestioningly by a group of bippies. The suggestion is made that today's young generation differs from all previous ones in that it has been fed much more data, both true and false, by TV, etc., than any previous one that it, therefore, has more and even a new sort of judgment and wisdom. The latter notion is arguable, to say the least, but certainly well worth more fictional exploration, which perhaps Stine will make.

Farmer's *The Image of the Beast* is an excruciatingly tough detective story with enormous and grotesque supernatural elements and a galloping pace which swings between humor and horror, the latter element predominating and the whole being pictured against a near-future Los Angeles suffering from an uncomfortably convincing smog attack, in which gas masks fetch very high prices and a general exodus has begun—by crawling, smog-belching automobiles!

That such diverse stuff can be even momentarily fitted together and given vivid reality is a testimony to Farmer's writing ability. Unlike Stine and even Geis for the most part, Farmer uses the particular freedom of the hardcore sex novel to seek out the most amazing and outrageous situations and images he can. For instance, it is

hard to top that of the naked bero, whom one almost must picture as the author, galloping in circles through a burning mansion, brandishing a rapier and having periodic sexual eruptions as automatic and uncontrollable as those of the geyser Old Faithful.

Another of the images utterly startled even Sturgeon, in his afterword, and will be further investigated in two novels sequel to *Image*. The image is that of a long, bearded serpent which emerges from a beautiful woman's womb and enters her mouth. I can't decide whether this image, taken as a symbol, is utterly startling or rather obvious.

As a pure detective story this book comes close to being very good, despite the intrusion of creatures from parallel universes, but intuition plays an over-large part and it stems from, though in no way libels, real persons to such a degree that Farmer can only broadly hint at, rather than explore, the solution. Still, there are those two other novels coming

All in all, I'd say hard-core sex has given science fantasy a really good goosing. Only next time, boys, let's tie it all up a little better.

Roger Zelazny: *Isle of the Dead*. Ace Science Fiction Special, N.Y., No. 37465, 1969. 190 pp., paper, 60¢

Reviewed by
TED WHITE

I think I could make a good case for the notion that Roger Zelazny is a god. It would be no less convincing than the one he makes in *Isle of the Dead* for the notion that Francis Sandow—the protagonist, the first-person narrator—is a god.

Isle of the Dead is a couple of

dozen different hooks, all of which I happen to admire. It is, on the surface, a hook about a very rich and powerful man who, when provoked by an enemy, destroys that enemy. That doesn't sound particularly interesting, but then, that's not really what the hook is. So let's hack off and try again.

Roger Zelazny has been working his way almost methodically through the folklore of many nationalities in his hooks. In *This Immortal* ("... And Call Me Conrad" was its intended title) he dealt with Greek myth in such a way that I strongly doubt anyone else will have the nerve to follow. *Lord of Light* took on the Hindu pantheon and threw in Buddhism and Christianity for lagniappe. *Creatures of Light and Darkness* attacks Egyptian mythology. Etc. What saves his works from the boredom of repetitiousness is that each and every time he finds a wholly new framework, and a wholly new story to tell. The richness of his invention, for instance, in the Hugo-winning *Lord of Light*, is altogether stunning. In *Isle of the Dead* Roger presents us with his *reducto ad absurdum*, except that it's in no way absurd: he creates a wholly new, alien, mythology with its own pantheon of gods, introduces his protagonist into this mythology (more or less despite Sandow's disbelief in the gods of Pei), and builds and resolves his conflict through this living mythology. (It is not Francis Sandow whom his enemy desires to destroy: it is Shimho of Darktree, Shrugger of Thunders, Sandow's Pei'an god-attribute. And his enemy is not really Gringrin, the Pei'an who resents Sandow's assumption of one of the Twenty Seven Names, but Gringrin's god-attribute,

Belion, the fire-god who is Shimho's traditional enemy.) The proof of the hook lies in the fact that if Zelazny's excursions into myth-lore in his previous hooks seemed solid and convincing—and it was—it is equally so here. And this time it's all Zelazny.

Or another tack:

Roger shares my fondness for several of the series-mystery hooks being written these days: Don Westlake's mystery-comedies, Lawrence Bloch's Evan Tanner series, and, I suspect, John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee books. The style of narration, even of story construction, in *Isle of the Dead* kept reminding me of MacDonald's McGee hooks. It's not slavish; it's not anything like a copy—but beginning with the first-person narration, the tough, sophisticated narrator (Francis Sandow, remember; rich, powerful, and a god), who opens the hook by telling you about the twentieth century Tokyo Bay and the things it washes up and how life is much like that—and continuing with Sandow's interpolated interludes in which he tells about some of the people he's known and some of the things he's done in the last twelve centuries—it's Travis McGee, in a curiously transmuted way. And when Sandow mentions a girl he once took in, helped make whole again after some terrible trauma, and then lost back to her former life, it is a very low how indeed to that professional therapist of broken-winged women, McGee. So there's this cynical idealism, this tough, hard-nosed sentimentalism to Francis Sandow that evokes other genres and other hooks, and wholly delights me.

Yet again:

Maybe *Isle of the Dead* is a story about a man's continuing maturation

process. After all, twelve centuries is enough time for a man to grow beyond that which we traditionally think of as manhood. Maybe in twelve centuries a man might mature—with the help of the alien Pei—into a kind of god. Particularly if he is telepathically gifted, has been taught how to shape whole worlds—for a profession (oh, lovely touch!)—and wants to go on living yet for a long time. Sandow, whatever he is now (the *now* of the book), is the product of many culminating forces, sometimes even against his will. He does not believe in Shimho, his god-attribute; he does not think that a real Shimho exists. He regards his attribute, this Name he wears, as a way of personalizing and thus dealing with his talent as a world-shaper. But then, he was taught that by the Pei'ans—and those who now wear the Names are all revisionists who have forsaken the old religion. Which is rationalization? The notion that the god-attribute is a psychological externalization—or the idea that a real such god might exist to cojoin with he who wears that god's Name? Presented with pretty convincing evidence by the book's end in support of the idea that Shimho is real and can manipulate him, Sandow is still not entirely convinced he is not fooling himself, still not certain it was not his own Id (or some other portion of his unconscious) that had possessed him.

A deceptively powerful book. I have only touched on some of its attributes.

Let me describe a few others on its outer layers: *Isle of the Dead* is an easy-to-get-into book. Unlike *Lord of Light* it has an easy, immediately ingratiating style of narration. It reads 'lightly' and in this lies its deception. Told and paced almost like a fast-reading thriller, it conceals behind its easy grin a considerable depth of poetry and feeling—sentiment, rather than sentimentality. And by its end, one is moved. It wasn't just a 'thriller' after all.

I closed the book, put it down on my lap, and I thought about Roger Zelazny, a man who writes more books and stories in his spare time than most of us can manage full-time. I thought about the power of myth-manipulation on which he seems to draw for the themes of his books, of the almost archaic strength of his story-telling abilities (in this era of plotlessness and modish lack of content). And then I thought of the Roger Zelazny who loves to set himself challenges, like elaborate cross-word puzzles, in the construction of each of his stories—one of those challenges resulted in his already-classic "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"—to whom *Isle of the Dead* must have been as much an amusement, a delight, as it was a task (rather like those marvelous worlds Sandow created as his profession).

And then I decided the analogy held true. If Francis Sandow is a god—and I think he is—what of his creator? What of Roger Zelazny?

THE END



THE HUNGRY

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

The Hungry was the darndest thing. It could fool the grownups, who didn't believe it existed. But not a baby who lived in the fabulous world of childhood.

THE spoon didn't like it. The spoon didn't like it one bit, having The Hungry in it. But spoons can't do anything.

"Come on, darling, one more spoonful," Mommy said, bending over him in his highchair and smelling nice and warm.

Mommy didn't know that The Hungry was in the spoon. Daddy didn't know either, although it was all his fault. Only Fluffy the cat knew, and she didn't care.

"Oh, darling, eat the lovely plum pudding. You like plum pudding. Come on, baby—"

Resolutely he turned his head and screwed his mouth tight. He liked plum pudding;

but now that The Hungry was in the spoon, he couldn't eat. The Hungry would try to hurt him. He knew it would.

"Well, if that's all, that's all," Mommy said. She straightened up from his highchair and wiped his mouth. Then she picked up the jar of plum pudding in one hand, and the spoon in the other. Mommy was very tall and light, although not as tall as Daddy. Daddy wasn't as light as Mommy, though. That's why Mommy was his favorite.

"Jim—would you—"

"No!" Daddy said in an almost-angry voice. He was sitting at his desk, and there

were all sorts of papers in front of him.

"You haven't even heard what I was going to ask you," Mommy said in her low voice, the voice she used when Daddy talked like that.

The Hungry heard. It grinned, in the spoon, and pushed.

"Oh, darn!" Mommy bent down to pick up the spoon. "Plum pudding on the rug. It comes out, doesn't it?"

"Don't ask me," Daddy muttered, bending over his papers. It was all Daddy's fault. If he hadn't gotten angry at Mommy this morning, The Hungry wouldn't have come. But he did, and The Hungry did. The Hungry always came when someone was angry at someone. That was how it ate.

The Hungry bothered the people downstairs a lot, because they were always shouting at each other. Daddy and Mommy laughed at the people downstairs. But it wasn't funny! Not with The Hungry there!

Mommy carried the spoon into the kitchen, but it was safe now. The Hungry had left it, and was flying slowly around the living room, looking for something to go into. It swirled around a lamp,

making it flicker, and he watched it with wide-open, unblinking eyes. Then he began to whimper.

"Oh, Lord," Daddy sighed, looking up from all his papers. "Can't we have a little quiet—even on a Sunday morning?"

"I wonder if he wants another bottle?" Mommy asked herself. But The Hungry had tasted Daddy's anger, and it made him even stronger. He darted across the room, and jumped into Daddy's pen.

Seeing that, he began to shake his highchair and cry in earnest.

"Damn it!" Daddy shouted, and threw down his pen. "A blot. How in hell am I supposed to concentrate with all this racket?"

The Hungry had made Daddy blame it on him, when it was really The Hungry's fault all along. The Hungry was very clever.

"He's only eleven months old," Mommy said in a voice that The Hungry tasted and liked. "I'm sorry his manners don't suit you."

That was the first time Mommy had been angry all morning. She hadn't said anything when Daddy complained about the burnt muffins, even though it hadn't been her fault. The Hungry had made

the toaster get hot too soon. And she hadn't gotten cross when Daddy accused her of hiding his cigarettes, when it was The Hungry that had pushed them behind the bureau. And when Daddy had been feeling cross because The Hungry was fluttering in front of his newspaper, making it hard to read, and he had told Mommy she wasn't staying within her budget, she hadn't even answered back.

But she was a little angry now.

Daddy was starting to feel sorry for the way he was acting, but The Hungry hurried over and blew his papers off the desk, making believe he was a breeze from the window.

"Everything's going wrong this morning," Daddy said.

"He'll be quiet now," Mommy said, and lifted him up, up, up, and put him on the living room rug.

Daddy picked up his papers, wiped his pen and lighted a cigarette. He got it started, even though The Hungry was trying to blow out the match, and went back to work. But he wasn't feeling nice.

The Hungry knew it, too. The last time The Hungry had come in Mommy had

burned her hand on the stove, and The Hungry had eaten the hurt for hours. He had eaten Daddy's sad feeling also. But he was very hungry now, and he wanted to eat even more.

The Hungry jumped into his rubber duck, thinking he wouldn't know. But he knew, and crawled away from it as fast as he could. Fluffy was also on the rug, and she just watched. Fluffy was no friend. She could see The Hungry, but she never paid any attention.

The Hungry jumped into Hansel, nearer him, and he started to cry again.

"Oh, no," Daddy said, and he clenched his hands tightly together.

"This just isn't one of his good days," Mommy said, not looking at Daddy.

"He never seems to have good days when I'm around," Daddy said, which was just what The Hungry wanted him to say.

"It's not that—" Mommy said.

"The hell it isn't," Daddy said. "Shut him up!"

He was crying very loud now, because The Hungry was standing just in front of him, spinning. Mommy picked him up and rocked him.

"There, there," she said.

"There, there, baby. There's nothing there. It's all right."

But it wasn't! Because he couldn't stop crying now, and Daddy was just as angry as he could be. Quickly The Hungry whirled over and rolled Daddy's cigarette off the ashtray.

"Your cigarette!" Mommy called, and Daddy picked it up. But The Hungry had been blowing on it, and there was a little hole in the rug.

"Can't you even put a cigarette down?" Mommy asked, in her low, cold, very-angry voice.

"Don't criticize me," Daddy said, in his low, cold, very-angry voice.

He started to scream as loud as he could, because suddenly he saw what The Hungry was planning.

"We haven't had that rug three months," Mommy said.

"Will you shut him up!" Daddy shouted desperately and suddenly.

Mommy put him on her shoulder and walked him up and down, but he couldn't stop, he just couldn't, because The Hungry was eating all Daddy's anger and planning a big hurt, even worse than the time he hurt Mommy.

"God, I can't stand this place," Daddy shouted. "I

can't stand that screaming, drooling child!"

"Then why don't you get out?" Mommy shouted back. She didn't mean it, of course; Daddy didn't either. But they weren't listening to what they were saying.

And Fluffy, on the rug, didn't do a thing. Over Mommy's shoulder he could see Fluffy, even while he cried, and Fluffy just lay there and watched The Hungry out of the corner of her eyes, and didn't care. And that was the saddest part, somehow, after all Daddy had done for Fluffy.

"I'm going out and get a drink!" Daddy shouted. He put down his pen with a bang and slipped on his jacket and walked to the door and opened it. Mommy walked over very slowly, holding him in her arms.

"You don't have to come back, you know," Mommy said, very quietly. Then The Hungry whizzed gaily around the room and dipped over Fluffy—Fluffy snarled and clawed at it—and it streaked out the front door. Fluffy went back to sleep, but The Hungry swept past Daddy and settled in the third step from the top of the landing. That was the step that Daddy said he was going to fix today, because it was so loose

and wobbly. The Hungry wrapped the step around itself, waiting until Daddy stepped on it.

Why didn't Fluffy do something? But Fluffy didn't care, now that The Hungry wasn't bothering her any longer, even though Daddy always fed her. And Mommy and Daddy couldn't see The Hungry, curled on the third step, waiting for Daddy to step on it. The Hungry would push him, and make sure he wasn't holding on. The Hungry would climb on him as he fell, and make sure he hit hard.

He stopped crying and stared at the third step. The Hungry stared back at him. He stared and stared at The Hungry that wanted to hurt Daddy.

"He's stopped crying," Mommy said.

In spite of his anger, Daddy looked at him. Daddy loved him, even though he didn't seem to sometimes. And Daddy was looking at him now.

"I wonder what he's looking at," Mommy said.

"Kids are like that," Daddy said, in his sorry voice. Sometimes they just stare at nothing."

"Sometimes they cry at nothing, too," Mommy said in her are-you-really-sorry voice.

"I suppose they do," Daddy said in his well-I-was-wrong-voice. He hesitated, then said, "Sorry, Grace."

"It does get on your nerves," Mommy said, and laughed. "Come on in and I'll fix you some lunch."

"O.K." Daddy smiled, and it was a very nice smile. The Hungry wasn't happy, though. Now that Daddy wasn't angry any longer, The Hungry couldn't stay. He melted away, and then he was gone.

"After lunch I'll fix those steps," Daddy said. "Now let's eat."

And as soon as Fluffy heard that she got up and rubbed against Daddy's pants leg, and Daddy bent down and stroked her.

But she hadn't helped! Not at all!

THE END



There is some cooperation between wild creatures. The stork and the wolf usually work the same neighborhood.

—Walt Whitman

The scientists used to say man was made up of a lot of water and a few cents' worth of chemicals. But it takes more than a scientist to know

THE WORTH OF A MAN

By HENRY SLESAR

I TELL you I'm being followed," Garth said to the undisturbed man at the desk. The claw jutting from his sleeve, ingeniously contrived for lifting, holding, lighting matches, turning pages, was no good for desk-thumping, so he put his emphasis in underlined words. Yet still the hospital psychiatrist seemed unimpressed. Placid glass-facaded eyes unblinking, he sat, a silent listener in the chair. Until he smiled.

"Would it make you happier to know that I believed you? Of course you're being followed, Mr. Garth. But not by hoodlums or assassins; no, no. There are phantoms following you, ghostly shapes of your fears. I hear the same story, from discharged patients like yourself. The blue-

print of their trauma is all the same. For them, the streets are crowded with shadowy assailants, out to fulfill the promise the War made them—the promise of sudden death. But what you need is not the physical protection of the law. No, Mr. Garth, we must make the arrest in your mind; we must track down the culprits lurking in your own emotional alleyways."

Garth slumped in the seat but without giving the appearance of relaxation; the metal spine which supported his back prevented that.

"I don't think you're right," he said.

"Ah, but I know I'm right. It's a phenomenon I've been acutely aware of since the War's end. But I don't mean to salve your wounds with

generalities. Let's talk about you, specifically."

He opened the Manila folder, pencil-marked *Garth*, on his desk. It was bulky. There were many records. He clucked his tongue at their volume and variety, but it was a reaction of professional interest and not sympathy.

"You spent how long in the hospital, Mr. Garth? The fact is here someplace, but—"

"Six years," Garth said, not bitterly. "I entered during the first year of the War, when the Missile hit. They performed a total of thirty-nine operations on me, and the recuperative, re-training period lasted twenty-six months."

"A terrible experience, of course. And equally terrible, the shock of recovery. Oh, yes, shock, because your return to the world outside the wards must be classified as a period of unique tension. For one thing, you probably reacted deeply to the transformation in the city: to the destruction of the major business and residential sections, to the failure of the public utilities, the homeless wanderers, the roving bands of looters and cutthroats, the ineffectual forces of law and order. And worst of all, the apparent devaluation of hu-

man life. Even when you realized the community was struggling back to normality, the shock was there. Wasn't it?"

"Yes. Yes," Garth said, looking away.

"You found yourself afraid. You lived with fear as a companion for every moment of your new freedom. When people looked your way, your heart pounded. When a ragged hoodlum brushed you in the street, you almost screamed with fear of attack. When a child cried out in the night, you woke sweating in your bed, certain that the cry was a warning to yourself."

"Are you telling me I'm crazy?"

"No, no, last thought in my mind, Mr. Garth. Last thought. Perhaps the War drove us all a little mad, and we must revise our standards of sanity. But fear, irrational fear, is a roadway to madness, and we have to block that roadway before it's too late. But I'll need your help, Mr. Garth."

Garth clicked the claw in his sleeve against his metal knee, in a gesture of surrender and cooperation.

"All right," he said. "I'll do what you want, Doctor."

"Fine. That's just fine, Mr. Garth." The psychiatrist

beamed. "Now all I want from you is a simple admission, just to begin. You're *not* being followed, are you? Nobody's *really* trying to kill you, are they?"

"No," Garth said, looking out the barred windows.

The Cisco Kid slapped a dirt-caked hand over Batman's mouth and flattened him against the dark side of the building. Batman mumbled and tried to bite and Cisco, wild, kneed him where it hurt most. Then he laughed and let go and Batman, tears in his eyes, said: "Oh, you lousy motherlover, what's the big idea?" "Shut up, big mouth," Cisco said, and put his face, lean and sharp like a hungry rat's, around the corner. "Here he comes. Get set, Batman old boy, get set, you motherlover, here comes money, money."

In his eagerness, his anxiety to please the sixteen-year-old Cisco, Batman, thirteen, jumped Garth when he was still in the sunlight. Cisco cursed his recklessness, but had to help. He smashed the hard edge of his palm against Garth's neck and howled when he struck metal. Then he banged the wedge-shaped rock he carried against Garth's forehead until their

victim went down and made no living sound.

"Drag him inside!" Cisco said, in a rising voice. He yanked at Garth's feet and Batman tried to lift the head; it was too heavy for him. They both went to the feet and dragged the body to the cellar door in the side of the old building.

They were more careful getting him down the steps. It was important to be careful. "Okay," the Cisco Kid said. "Take off his clothes."

Batman stripped away the hospital suit, babbling all the time. "What'll he bring, Cisco, huh, watcha think he'll bring?"

"I dunno, I dunno," Cisco said, lighting a butt. He stepped away and surveyed the corpse professionally. "That arm ought to bring around ten, maybe fifteen bucks. The leg's good for twenty. I hear they use real gold in the neck brace, so that oughta pull a good forty. The silver thing in his head should be around thirty-five. All in all, I'd say he's worth a hundred bucks."

"A hundred bucks! A hundred bucks!" Batman said, clutching his friend in excitement and ecstasy. "Oh, sweet mother of mercy, who'da thought he'd be worth a *hundred bucks!*"

THE END

FANTASY FANDOM

When Hugo Gernsback began publication of our sister magazine, *AMAZING STORIES*, in 1926, he set a number of powerful forces in motion. Not the least of these was the developing interest of his readers in a "fandom" of the science fiction/fantasy genres. By the late 1920's readers of *AMAZING* were contacting each other through the addresses printed in *AMAZING*'s letter column. By 1930 the first amateur magazine devoted to fan material had appeared. And by the late thirties, organized fandom was in full swing. Dozens of fan magazines were being published (usually with circulations ranging from less than fifty to several hundred), clubs had sprung up in many cities (the clubs in Los Angeles and Philadelphia are still meeting today, some thirty years later), and such specialized organizations as the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and the National Fantasy Fan Federation were already launched or soon to be.

Over the years a great deal of excellent material (some fiction, but mostly articles and informal essays) has appeared in the fanzines. Today better than one hundred titles are currently being published (and reviews of some of them can be found in the current *AMAZING STORIES*), and in many cases their contributions deserve wider publication.

That is the purpose of this department. Each issue in Fantasy Fandom we will be reprinting an article, essay or story from a contemporary fanzine.

The following article is part of a column, "Old Bottles," which Bill

Meyers wrote for *VOID* #29. The piece was written in 1962, but because the issue in question was delayed in publication some seven years (fanzines rarely adhere to rigid schedules), was only recently published. In the meantime, Meyers—a graduate student at Columbia when he wrote the piece—has been published in *Esquire*, and has moved out to the San Francisco area.

In case you're wondering, I was *VOID*'s publisher, and one of its several editors. (Among the other editors: Terry Carr, presently an editor with Ace Books; Greg Benford, the founder of the fanzine in 1955, and presently a physicist and science fiction writer; John D. Berry, who is handling the fanzine review column in *AMAZING*; and Arnie Katz, the publisher of *QUIP*, one of the better present-day fanzines.) But I did not pick Bill Meyers' "Tolkien and Temperaments" simply because I first published it. Inasmuch as Meyers relates the works of J.R.R. Tolkien to his own experiences and draws larger conclusions about fantasy fiction, I could think of no better article with which to launch this department.

— Ted White

I was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a city surrounded by mountains, an island of civilization in a sea of wilderness, a boundary line between the moonshine and the mint julep. Between the time of my birth and the time I was six, that period in which my super-ego was lovingly molded, I lived in an old two-story

house on the side of a hill. There were mammoth oak trees in the front, small oak trees in the back, and a magnolia on the side. About every ten minutes the trolley clattered down the street in front of our house; and every week the darkies had their meetings and sang their spirituals out in back.

It was Southern all right. But something more . . .

In the front room there was a black upright piano with yellowed keys. The piano bench smelled like sweat, but the piano itself smelled like old mellowed wood, a very luscious smell that pianos ought to have. Resting on the piano was a book of scores, which was always opened at page 1 of a Beethoven sonata because when my father occasionally played he never got past the first ten bars. . .

Hanging above the piano was a print of a painting of the Black Forest. It was a very popular print for its time but no one seemed to have known who painted it. It showed a broad path, almost a cathedral-like corridor, which led into the forest and was covered by vast, over-hanging tree-limbs. It was autumn in the forest and the rays of the setting sun shot through the limbs and glistened on the golden leaves which, having overburdened the limbs, were fluttering down in different places. A strange white mist hovered above the path and, off in the distance there was a glow of white light where, apparently, the path left the dark seclusion of the trees and came out into the open, or else something which glowed was coming up the path.

I liked to believe it was something which glowed—perhaps a knight, or a troop of elves.

The painting helped to shape me

and my imagination. It was, without my realizing it, a beautiful visual supplement to the tales read to me by my mother and grandmother out of a dusty black tome written by somebody called Grimm. It wasn't so much of a painting as a window through which our living room looked out on the Black Forest. And, as the occasion willed it, depending on what was being read to me at the time, young knights and fair princesses, elves and trolls, all used the path to get to wherever they were going, which was, of course, somewhere in the Black Forest.

Whatever happened in that room, the painting was always there. It could barely be seen behind the stream of dust motes which danced in front of the windows on early summer mornings. It glowed cherry-red when all the lights were cut off but the ones on the Christmas tree. It was a golden-brown flicker when the furnace broke down and we all had to huddle around the fireplace. It hung there silently while my grandmother painstakingly taught me how to play Chopsticks and stayed just as silent while I played naughty games with the little girl from down the street. But it was there most eminently when the rain poured down the grey window-panes and I had nothing else to do but sit and stare at it, and be drawn into it.

Yet more . . . I believed wholeheartedly—and there was no other way to believe at that age—that the mountains which surrounded our town were inhabited by elves, dwarves, trolls, and all manner of such faerie folk. This belief was not simply due to a rich imagination but was stimulated by the fact that the community which lived on one of these mountains, in

in cahoots with a major tourist attraction there, had taken this faerie atmosphere as its motif. The place was riddled with caves, which were officially called Fairyland Caverns. Roads were appropriately named Fairyland Trail, Dwarf Lane, Elvenwood Drive. It was not so much the names, however, which contributed to the illusion of magic and enchantment but the fact that there were cold little streams running out of icy grottos, dark green corridors leading into the forests, and, in the most unlikely places—half-concealed by a hush, sitting on a rock by a stream—small statues of dwarves and elves. These statues had nothing to do with community projects, as far as I was concerned, but had simply been sitting there for ages, having either grown out of the stones or having once been real dwarves and elves on which strange spells had been cast. The real ones, I felt, were always lurking nearby.

By putting the right pressure on my grandmother, I occasionally was able to take trolley rides to the end of the line. The best line was the one which went up to and ran along the top of one of the mountains; the time I liked to ride it best was around October. It wasn't like the other lines which mostly ran down the middle of the streets; it was more like a small railroad which went through gulleys and passes and thick forests quite similar to the forest in the painting above our piano. I liked to lean out the back and watch the whirls of golden leaves fly around behind the car as it slowly clattered along the tracks.

But in the winter I usually stayed inside the house. It rained a lot—cold, grey rains that iced up the black trunks of the oak trees outside. On

days like that it was always dark inside the house as well, no matter how many lights were turned on. But sometimes the curtains would part and the sun would reveal itself against its splendid bright blue backdrop; then you could see clearly miles, and, all around, the snow-capped mountains sparkled with light.

Even though my ancestry could be traced to Scotland on one side and the Bavarian Alps on the other, that environment produced in me a deeply-imbedded feeling for Celtic fantasy and Teutonic darkness.

It was little wonder that I later came to love the works of Thomas Wolfe (the greatest Teutonic Southerner of them all) and Ray Bradbury (fantasy in a Wolfean style). Wolfe hit me pretty hard, because he was the closest I had come at that time—age 16—to finding an identical temperament, but my first confrontation with Tolkien was an unforgettable experience. This wasn't due to an even greater temperamental affinity with Tolkien—he isn't the type of writer whose temperament is immediately available for identification—but to the fact that the world-picture delineated in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* struck my deepest temperamental chords.

I was sprawled in a hot, lumpy chair on a hot summer day, dripping with sweat, when I first started *The Hobbit*. By the time I got to the part where the elves made their appearance, "with a strange glow about their feet like the glow on the horizon where the moon is about to rise," I began to realize what the hook was going to mean to me. I got up, drove over to my grandparents' and asked them if they had any use for the

old picture of the Black Forest for which they had since substituted a lurid water color. They didn't, and were pleased to get rid of it. I took it back and hung it on my wall, and there, at least, was a part of Tolkien's world—the road through Mirkwood. And I finally knew what that glowing thing was, coming up the path.

What I am trying to say here is not "why Tolkien is great"; I'm only trying to explain one of the reasons for why his books should have had such a colossal effect on me—why all the ganglia of my very temperament should have quivered with ecstasy. He very beautifully tied up in one intricate knot all the thousands of strands of imaginative lore I'd delighted in as a child. He wrote about a whole world which was so fundamentally akin to what was at the foundation of my very self and identity that I almost lost my balance and fell into the chasm between this one and that. He did this not by titillating any nostalgic, sentimentalized half-memories, but by yanking out by the roots what was solid and substantial and cloathing it in the impervious armor of mature, literary insight.

This was one of the main reasons why I liked Tolkien. Why was everyone else so enthusiastic about him, too? Surely for the same reasons, I naively thought. I don't think one is ever stunned quite so sharply by the rock wall of an alien temperament than when he tries to fully communicate his feelings about what he considers to be good and beautiful. This is not to say that I slammed the cover shut on the last page of *The Return of the King* and ran out to spread the word. I simply found, in talking with other

people who had read the book, that they were enthusiastic over it for entirely different reasons—most of which were also different from each other.

Of course, I never knew exactly what went on in the depths of their alien minds as they read Tolkien; I could only listen to what they had to say. I remember, for instance, a friend telling me about Tolkien before I had ever read anything by him. He was so carried away he was going to get someone with a mellifluous voice to record the whole trilogy on tape. Then he was going to play the tapes continuously while he slept, and since he claimed—he identified with Gandalf, he'd be able to take nightly sojourns into another world where he could dominate the destinies of men.

Identification played a great part with a lot of people. I suppose I, myself, identified more with Frodo than with any other character, though not to a great extent. Mostly I was just an innocent observer with the narrator pointing out things for me. But another friend of mine strongly identified with Gimli and got thrills from imagining himself swinging a bloody battle-axe. Another couldn't finish it because "it wasn't realistic"—that is, he couldn't identify.

Other reactions had to do with literary technique. One writer I know raved about the intricate machinations of its plot. Another is still writing articles and even a book philological subtleties and its place in the evolution of the epic. And then some reactions were somewhat antipathetic. When I asked my English instructor at Columbia to read Tolkien, he commented afterwards that Hobbiton seemed to be designed after Trollope's Barchester,

and that the book as a whole was too realistic for an epic, too vast in scope for a novel.

But when a group of people on the West Coast publicized their bizarre views of how they thought the book should be filmed, I was struck by the full import of what it meant to be alien. Finally, a comics artist friend, upon finishing *The Lord of the Rings*, thought that Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars books were much better.

The reactions were obviously diverse—as diverse as the environments in which the people had been brought up. And it seems to me that the most significant time in one's life is that time in which the environment begins to permanently mold one's character (or super-ego). It determines to a large extent one's reactions to everything throughout the rest of his life. For instance, the person whose reactions to Tolkien were most similar to mine was a friend who was brought up in the same town, in an old

two-story house, surrounded by mountains, and in whose living-room hung a painting of the Black Forest.

The true test of literature is its power to evoke human truths in all those who read and understand it, no matter what their environments. Certainly, despite the fact that Tolkien produces wildly varied reactions, he also succeeds in communicating things which have a common effect on all those who read and like his books, no matter what their main reasons may be for liking them. Out of the many people I've discussed the books with at one time or another, practically all admitted to being moved to tears, if not throughout the book, certainly at the end. Music, I feel, has a far tighter grip on the human emotions than literature ever has, but when a book surpasses music, as Tolkien's apparently does, in its ability to stir the emotions into a quivering pudding, it's a rare book indeed.

(Continued from page 7)

"Whatever it is, you can't borrow it. Get out of here. Don't think I don't know the trouble you've made for me around here, Wooley. Out."

"All right, all right," Wooley said. "I couldn't find it anyway."

He beat a retreat down the corridor, relieved that Leith hadn't walked in a minute earlier. When he reached his own office, Holland was piling papers on his desk.

"What's this?" Wooley asked.

"I'm not staying," Holland said. "I don't think we're going to work well together. They've got a desk I can use in the Department Office until they can find me another place."

"What's the matter with you?" Wooley asked. "Why should you leave?"

"What's the matter with you?" Holland asked. "They told me that nobody would stay in an office with

you, and I can't stomach you, either. And I'd advise you not to pull any of your tricks on me."

Leith, somewhat strained, had closed the door behind Wooley when he had left. He wondered if he should have been less harsh. He knew that all it did was make him sound petulant, and that was something he was trying to break himself of, even with Wooley. But it was hard.

He looked then at the strip of wood marked with little pencil lines, and smiled with slightly malicious delight at what he saw. He picked up the pencil that Wooley had abandoned and replaced the tick that had been erased.

The top tick was on the level of his eyes now, perhaps even a little lower and he wondered how long it would be before Wooley finally noticed.

He said, quite softly, "I'm growing up, Wooley. What's your excuse?"



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